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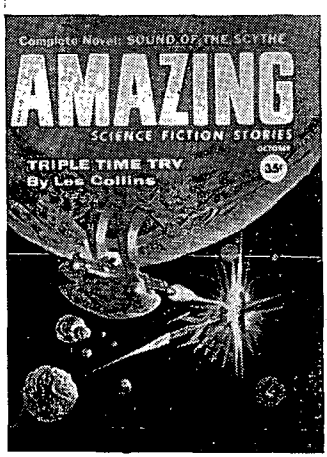

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Editorial

IT SEEMS a long way from cosmic rays to the theory of evolution, but a new hypothesis provides a fascinating possible link between the two.

Not long ago a top authority on cosmic rays, Dr. Bernard Peters, announced that some cosmic rays originate in supernovae. When a star blows up, the explosion-created gas clouds, he said, blast out tremendous amounts of cosmic radiation.

Dr. Peters also thinks that on several times in its history our planet passed through such "hot" gas clouds, taking about 1,000 years each time to traverse the cloud. And he suggests that the tremendous jump in radiation falling on the earth during those passages may have precipitated major turning points in evolution.

All of this is, of course, just theory. But what fascinating theory! Was it radiation from an exploded star that wiped out the giant lizards? Or that so mutated a tree-dwelling, monkey-like being that its brain suddenly started to grow? Or that caused tiny Eohippus to change into Dobbin?

Other fantastic reports on cosmic rays come from a Japanese research team. It found that a "hot spot" in the sky, near the constellation Orion, is an especially intense source of cosmic rays, and that the intensity varies in an 18-day cycle.

Can it be that beings on Orion are aiming a cosmic-ray gun at us in an effort to change our evolution?

Or is it just the heat of the summer in our office that gives rise to these fantasies?—NL

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fantastic

Science Fiction Stories

OCTOBER 1959

Volume 8 Number 10

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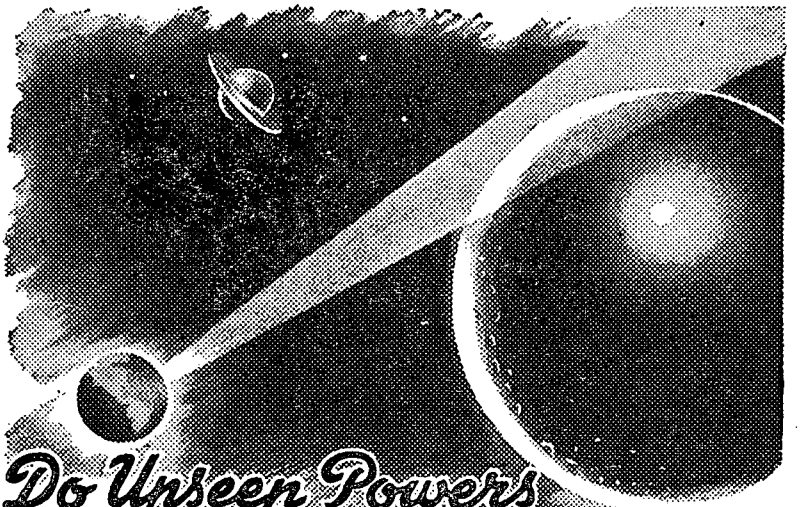

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WINTER BOY, SUMMER GIRL

By JOHN CHRISTOPHER

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

Give a good writer an eternal theme, and watch a vital new story be born of it. Here the author of the famous "No Blade of Grass" traces the love affair of two young — and naive — persons in two worlds they never made.

EVEN with the summer people, Romie understood, it was customary for the children of Watchers to become Watchers in their turn. With the Winter people, of course, there was no choice in the matter. All were Watchers. If the small population increased, that meant more free time. If it were ever to decrease, there would be longer or more frequent work shifts for all.

On his twenty-first birthday, his father took him into the main Dormitories for the first time. It was a cold day in December, with snow threatening. But inside the great doors the air was warm, the duty shift dressed in light clothes with some even in shirt sleeves or blouses.

"This is it," his father said. "Biggest in the whole world. What do you think of it?"

He looked around helplessly. Their own Dormitory was a side annex, just inside the doors, with a simple control panel, manned by a dozen Summer Watchers. Here, in this vast central hall, there must be more than two hundred at work. The boards themselves were of a fantastic meaningless complexity. A light winked on one of them, and a Watcher spoke softly into the microphone before him. There was an underground staff as well, Romie remembered, four or five times as large as the controlling one.

On all sides the tunnels ramped downwards. The moving walks were stilled; small scooter-trucks carried Watchers in and out of the tunnel

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Jill and Romie each loved their own season—
but they loved one another more.

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mouths. He tried to count the tunnels, but there were too many of them.

"How many people?" he asked.

His father shrugged. "Too many. Thirty ways, each with half a million. We've been running close to capacity the last few years. You can figure it as close on fourteen million, give and take a couple of hundred thousand."

The words didn't mean anything, but the thought did—the thought of a hundred thousand rooms, each room stacked with more than a hundred cocoons, and in each cocoon a barely living, scarcely breathing human being . . . His flesh prickled slightly at the thought, with revulsion.

"An ant-heap," he said.

His father caught the overtone of contempt. He looked at him for a moment before speaking.

"You passed your psych-test," he said at length, "so I guess you're O. K. But you have to watch those habits of mind. For one thing, there'll be re-checks and you won't always know about them. For another . . ."

He paused. "Winter living, as we do, we get used to the idea of an empty world. Off duty we live separate and apart. Maybe you've never seen as many people together in one place as you have now in this control room. But don't you start despising the Summer people. We depend on them, not them on us."

Romie said: "Maybe." He gestured towards the control panel. "But if something went wrong—we could get along."

"It's all in the history books," his father said. "The world had too many people, not enough food. We learned how to hibernate just in time. It made sense to put the world to sleep for the winter. And there had to be some to stay awake and look after them. But they're the ones that count, not us.

Sure, we could get by without them. But as peasants. And old-fashioned peasants at that. It's the Summer people that produce the machines, as well as the food. We depend on them for everything. All they depend on us for is looking after them during the Winter."

"I still think there are too many of them," Romie said.

"You don't have to like them," his father told him. "So long as you respect them, it's O. K."

The Summer Watchers, because they would be the first to be awakened, were in the

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room nearest to the control panel. During the Summer the great vaults would be empty, so few were needed. In the room there were twenty cocoons, and only a dozen of them occupied.

Romie saw her on his first tour of inspection. She lay in the third cocoon, her fingers touching across her breast, dark hair falling back from a pale, lovely face. He glanced, and then stared. There was a code number stamped in the plastic of the cocoon, and he checked it against his record card. Jill Duniell. Age nineteen. Control Check Assistant. He started to walk on, and then came back to look at her again.

Each day after that, he lingered by the cocoon. Suddenly, for all the millions who rested here in the Dormitory, and in thousands of other Dormitories throughout the bustling northern hemisphere, this one wakened him to the strangeness and wonder of it all. She was alive, but only barely so, the process of living slowed down to a tenuous flicker, flesh chilled to half its normal temperature. A half of every year would be lost to this dreamless sleep, but she could expect another hundred and thirty summers of life, as her normal span.

As he could, of winters. A hundred and thirty years, in worlds utterly separate and divided from each other. He pressed his hands against the barely yielding plastic, and wondered what color her eyes would be.

They were blue, but so dark as to be almost violet. He watched them open, and he saw her smile.

She said: "Hello. Time to live again?"

"March 27," he told her, as the regulations prescribed, "five degrees Centigrade and a little late snow. Bacon and eggs for breakfast."

"Good. I love the snow. I've got an early off-duty week this year. I can do some skiing."

"Where do you go?"

"The French Alps. Near Chamonix."

"I've been there."

"Have you been up the *téléférique* to the Aiguille du Midi?"

He shook his head. "They don't run in Winter. We have to make do with copters."

"Of course. I'd forgotten. Are you new to Watching? I haven't seen you before."

"I started last December."

She smiled. "Winter privileges. We begin at eighteen. Ah, well. I suppose the season's work has got to be

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tackled." She looked around her. "You've wakened me first. It should have been the Chief."

"I know." His eyes stared into hers. "I was hoping you would be willing to pretend to be still asleep while I did the others."

"Of course I will. Then it wasn't a mistake? But why did you do it?"

He hesitated. "Because I've watched over you since I came to the Dormitory. I wanted to talk to you while we were still alone."

She said softly: "I understand. Thank you. What's your name?"

"Romie Peters."

"Sleep well, Romie," she said. "I'll watch over you."

Her voice whispered to him; from a long way off and then closer and closer.

"Wake up, Romie. October 5, fourteen Centigrade, and a misty morning after rain. Bacon and eggs for breakfast."

He looked into her tender smiling face.

"What was summer like?"

"Patchy. We had a good August, but there was a lot of rain in the other months. There were floods in the west country, and the harvest was damaged. A stratoplane was lost in a high thunderstorm."

"And you?" he asked. "How was it with you?"

"Swimming and boating," she said. "Dancing and tennis . . . the usual things, with the usual people."

He shook his head. "I don't know them. They're no friends of mine."

She wrinkled her face, still smiling. "Are you jealous?"

"I don't dance very well. We don't do it much."

"I could teach you."

Hungrily, he said: "What else did you do?"

"What else should I do? I watched over you. You look cute when you're sleeping. All those hard wintry lines soften out."

"Do I look hard and wintry usually?"

"Winter people always do. Haven't you noticed it? But you much less than the others. When you're happy I should think you could pass as Summer."

"I'm happy now."

"I know," she sighed. "But you will have to pretend to be asleep now, while I wake the others."

"So soon?"

"I'm afraid so. But there will still be the two days of the change-over before I go to my cocoon."

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"Two days. And having to talk to each other and look at each other with formality and stiff politeness."

"Winter and Summer," she said. "That's the way it is."

He went winter-sporting in January, but he reported back for duty before the fortnight was up. He went down to Jill's room, and stood quietly, staring at her through the transparent shield. A curl of hair had fallen errantly across her brow, and all winter he had wanted to smooth it back. It would be another two months before the waking.

He looked at her more thoughtfully. An idea had come to him. The regulations forbade it, but regulations could be broken. Two months. It would take that long to think things over, to make his plans.

She said: "Romie! I think I dreamt of you. I know the sleep is supposed to be dreamless, but I think I did. You were walking somewhere by yourself, and everything was quiet and lonely . . ."

"Listen," he said. "I need your help."

She rebuked him. "You haven't said what date it is, or what the weather is like, or that there's bacon and eggs for breakfast. Romie, you're looking wintry and hard."

""My cocoon," he said, "in the Winter annex—I've disconnected all the leads."

"Then it won't work?"

"No. Do you have access to the main records?"

She nodded. "Of course."

"Can you delete my entry?"

She understood his meaning. "You'll stay awake through summer? But what if they find out?"

He shrugged. "They won't. It can't be hard to hide among fourteen million."

"Money? I have some, but . . ."

"You forget I'm from Winter. Money means nothing to us because everything is ours for the taking. I have fourteen thousand sterling put by. Is that enough?"

"More than enough. You'll be rich." Her eyes smiled at him. "Will you take me to Venice?"

"Anywhere. You'll help me?"

"I'll help you."

The Winter Watchers went to their cocoons before the Summer people came out from theirs; the mass wakings were automatically controlled. From behind the one-way windows of the Winter Annex, Romie saw it happen. With a

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subdued but echoing whirr the moving ways went into action, and within a few minutes the first of the Summer people were pouring out onto the upper levels—the first of fourteen million. Romie knew the figures, but the fact made his head reel. Ten thousand a minute, six hundred thousand an hour—in less than twenty-four hours the Summer cocoons would be empty, and the Summer people scattered into the workaday harvest world, crowded and busy.

He watched them for some time, marvelling at their noisiness, the inane cheerfulness of their expressions, most of all at the sheer magnitude of their numbers. To begin with he was fascinated, then bored, then a little disgusted. He had to remind himself that these were Jill's people and, if his plans came to full maturation, would be his. He would take on a Summer identity. For him, too, Winter would be the time of sleeping.

Jill came in through a side door. She said:

"All's well. I should think it would be safer for you to go out now and mix with the crowd. Your cocoon is officially ranked as vacant. And I've been able to get an apartment for you. It's in Lakeside, just across the road from mine. It's quite a nice room—I've seen it."

"Room . . . how big is it, anyway?"

"It has a shower and kitchenette." She smiled. "I see . . . Where do you usually live?"

"Court Central—on the top floor."

She shook her head. "You Winter Millionaires! Living space is precious with us."

"You said I would be rich. Can't I buy a bigger place, or rent one?"

"I wouldn't. You're not rich enough for that. And besides, you don't want to be conspicuous. Here's your key. I'll come and see you tomorrow when I'm off duty. I didn't have time to get food in. You can eat in the restaurant."

She kissed him lightly, and went away. Romie looked after her for a moment, and then went out to join the teeming throng.

"Well?" she said.

He moved to one side to let her enter the tiny bed sitting-room which made up the bulk of his new home. He said with conviction:

"It's good to see you."

"How has it been?" Seeing him hesitate, she went on: "You're looking wintry again."

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He made an effort to smile. "Nothing much. A bit of a headache. I didn't sleep too well."

"What was wrong?"

"The noise . . ." He shook his head in bewilderment. "It went on till past three o'clock, and by that time . . ."

"There are a lot of people here." She looked at him sympathetically. 'You'll have to get used to that."

"But surely they could do something about it—adequate sound insulation or something?"

"Summer people don't mind noise. In fact, they like it. Have you had something to eat?" Romie shook his head again. "Why not?"

"I wasn't too hungry. I went down to the restaurant, but . . . I don't know. All these people eating together. We don't often eat together, even in families."

"It's bound to be a shock at first. Don't worry, darling. You'll adjust to it."

It was the first time she had called him darling. He put his hand out and she took it with her own.

"If you help me," he said.

Three weeks later, Jill managed to get a week's leave and they went to Venice together. For Romie it was all new—the stratoplane that took them to Milan, then the monorail taking them eastwards along the valley of the Po. None of these mass-transport devices were in use during winter, he explained to Jill; each had his own copter and a choice of autos.

She sighed. "It sounds wonderful."

The monorail carriage was as crowded as Italian means of transport have been since Roman times. In a cheerful babel of noise, passengers drank coffee, peeled oranges, fed babies at the breast. Although the gauze blinds were down, it was oppressively hot. Opposite them a spade-bearded rabbi expertly twirled spaghetti, washing it down with drafts of Chianti. Television screens flickered at intervals along the central arch. At the far end, someone sang in a loud throaty tenor voice.

He had thought that things would ge easier, but instead they got harder. The impact of his fellow human beings, in the mass, was like the constant twisting of a nerve center, which never dulled into mere discomfort. He tried to tell himself how unreasonable it was, but that was no good. A child ran shrieking along the aisle, and he had to clench

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his nails into the palms of his hands.

They reached Venice at last, checked in at their hotel, and took a gondola to St. Marks. The Grand Canal was black with small craft. A funeral barge floated by, with a sound of wailing. All the boats were antiques; there was no room here for skimmers to maneuver.

They landed and walked through a thickening crowd to the Piazza. Cathedral and campanile drowsed in the sun.

Jill said: "It's far lovelier than I had imagined. The softness of the air . . ."

He said, almost vehemently: "You haven't seen it in winter! The bare outlines of the buildings, the sharp sky—the peace and quiet of it."

"Yes, I suppose so. Let's sit here and watch the pigeons."

"When I came," Romie said, "I was by myself. I put my copter down—there. Nothing moved. The sun was in the west—big and red. And suddenly a whole cloud of birds drifted in across the waters and settled near me."

"Romie darling," she said, "are you unhappy?"

He looked at the eddying mass all around them.

"Without you I would be," he said. "As it is . . ."

Summer hammered on. Early in September they had a few days at Biarritz. The big Atlantic breakers swelled towards sands on which people huddled together under beach umbrellas. The noise of the sea was almost inaudible beneath the clamor of portable radios and recorders and TV sets, and the continuous ape-like prattle of the holiday-makers.

Jill said: "Would you rather go for a walk, up in the hills? I hadn't realized it would be quite so bad here."

He leaned towards her. The sound and presence of the crowd made them private.

"I want to ask you something."

"Yes?"

"Will you come with me?"

The words were imprecise, but the way they were spoken supplied the meaning. She looked at him seriously.

"Into winter?"

"Yes. Into winter."

"It will be more difficult, won't it?"

"A little, perhaps. But it can be done. There aren't any crowds to hide in, but there's an empty world. In some ways it's easier. Will you?"

"Yes. I will."

He said exultantly: "All the things I can show you—that

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we can do together. Just wait and see."

Snow fell early that year in Austria and he took her up into the mountains for skiing. They stayed in a deserted hotel, with a white spur looming above them and a deep blue sky over that. She had never cooked for herself, so he taught her. Their feet echoed in the empty rooms and corridors.

They clambered up the ski-slope and stared around them, prior to skiing down.

"Look!" he said.

She looked. There was an empty valley; trackless snow on which nothing moved but an old raven. She shivered slightly at the vast loneliness of it.

"Cold? We mustn't hang about. Race you down to the hotel."

She smiled and nodded, and he started off. For a few moments she watched him go, diminishing away from her, and then, with almost frantic haste, propelled herself after him.

They wandered through Vienna, Rome, Geneva, Paris. The cities were theirs and theirs only. Once they saw another copter, and once an auto, speeding from Geneva towards the Swiss Dormitory. But they remained alone, unobserved, untrammelled.

In the Louvre, in front of a dream-like sunset of Claude of Lorraine, Jill said:

"It's strange. In summer there are guards all over the place. And now . . . what would happen if you took a painting?"

"Why should one? They are here whenever we want to look at them."

"Or damaged one? Drew a beard on that Rubens Venus?"

He looked shocked for a moment; then he smiled.

"I suppose we're conditioned against it. After all, we are the guardians. We learn very early to wipe our feet on the mat and not to drop cigarette ash."

She said restlessly: "Of course. It's a very civilized way to behave. But you take food and things."

"We always leave a chit. The government pays. Just because we can take what we want, we only take what we need. You understand?"

"Yes. I think so. It's different for someone like me. The summer world doesn't give one the chance to be foolish and extravagant. So one wants to."

Romie smiled. "What particular excess do you have in mind?"

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"Oh, anything—bathing in champagne!"

He put his arm on hers. "Back to the hotel, then," he said, "and I'll run you a bath."

"And leave a chit for three dozen magnums?"

"Of course. There are no limits."

She shook her head. "Never mind. It would be cold. And probably flat."

When he had to report back for duty, he found her a penthouse apartment and settled her in with provisions, books, music and TV tapes.

"It won't be too bad," he told her. "I only have duty every other day, and only for four hours. The rest of the time we can be together. You will be all right, won't you?"

"Yes," she said. "I'll be all right."

But he worried about her while he was away, and about the drawn look in her face when he returned. He devised things to distract and entertain her: dancing to recorded music in the Ritz, swimming in the vast deserted Empire Pool, exploring the quaint corners of the City, where not even a rat stirred. In clubs in Pall Mall, they turned the pages of the year's last issue of *The Times* — copies that would stay there, yellowing at the edges, until the world came to life again, and with it the presses in Printing House Square. In the Houses of Parliament, they sat together in the Speaker's chair, and watched the dust settling on the opposing empty benches.

Then, one day, he was detained half an hour on duty. He gunned his car at speeds close to a hundred along the silent streets. But when he reached her, she was weeping hopelessly. He tried to comfort her.

"It was less than half an hour. Jill, darling, I'm here now. Nothing's wrong. Everything's fine."

She said: "I thought something had happened to you—that I'd been left alone, in this horrible empty world."

"Nothing's wrong," he repeated. "You're all right now."

She stared at him. "The silence—the loneliness . . . I can't bear it, Romie. I just can't bear it. Even when you're with me, it frightens me. And by myself . . . I think in another five minutes I would have been screaming."

"The music," he said, "the tapes . . ."

"They make it worse. Knowing that there's no-one within miles—that all the sounds and sights are synthetic, unreal.

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Darling, I've tried. But I can't go on."

He said, faintly hoping: "If I went to the Chief and told him everything—if he got a special dispensation and admitted you as one of the Winter people—you wouldn't be so lonely."

She shook her head. "There would still be this empty world."

He recognized the finality of the decision. With a touch of bitterness, he said:

"Then love doesn't cast out fear—not quite."

Her eyes appealed to him. She said only:

"Could you live, in Summer?"

When he turned away from the cocoon, he noticed that there was someone in the room with him. His father. He must have witnessed the sealing.

"All right," Romie said. "You know. She helped me to stay through Summer and stayed with me in Winter. Now what happens?"

His father came over to him, and looked at the cocoon.

"She's beautiful. But the loneliness was too much for her?"

"Yes."

"She lasted longer than most do, at that."

He was startled. "Then it's happened before?"

His father nodded. "Mostly for the same reasons. Sometimes out of curiosity. I tried a Summer when I was your age. I came back to the Annex after a month, with my tail between my legs."

"What punishment did you get?"

His father smiled. "None."

"But the regulations . . ."

"The regulations were made before we became two races. Now they don't matter. Have you ever thought about sleep?"

"What about it?"

"It's not a biological necessity. Some creatures became diurnal, others nocturnal. In prehistory, adaptation to one environment inhibited activity in the other. The only thing to do was get out of the way and sleep until the sun came up—or the moon. That's what happened with us, only on a larger scale. More than four generations have been hibernating half the year. An individual can no more break the pattern than he can break the habit of sleep."

Romie looked at the motionless girl in the cocoon.

"Then we live in different worlds."

"We have no choice."

Romie straightened up. "I'd

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better report to the Chief, I suppose," he said. "Even though there's no punishment."

"He knows," his father said. He nodded towards the cocoon. "Stay with her for a while. There's time enough."

He left him in the room. Romie gazed through the transparent shield. She was beautiful, and contented, and at peace.

"All my life," he whispered.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

For what is probably the first time in science-fiction history, a magazine is devoting its entire issue to the new work of one author.

The magazine: The November issue of FANTASTIC.

The author: **Fritz Leiber.**

This super-special issue will be both a tribute to our readers—to give them the best science fiction by one of the best writers—and to Leiber, in recognition of the talent and devotion he has poured into science fiction.

There will be a novella, a novelet, and three short stories—each one brand new and written especially for this issue.

Miss the November FANTASTIC at your peril! They will be grabbed off the newsstands, so reserve your copy early. November FANTASTIC, the Fritz Leiber issue, will be on sale October 20.

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THE MAGIC, MAGIC CARPET

By A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

What do you do if you run into a beautiful harem girl and an angry sultan on Luna? You remember the Arabian Nights! Or else!

IT WAS not a good landing —but it was the first. Matheson, the Pilot, had years of experience, the wrong kind of experience, behind him—years of riding the short-hop ferry rockets up from Earth to the Satellites, years of matching orbital velocities, years of screaming down through the atmosphere at the controls of what were, for the homeward passage, aircraft rather than spacecraft. He knew as much—and as little—of a powered, stern-first landing on the surface of an airless planet as any man in the world. It was not enough.

Matheson cut the drive sooner than he should have done and without having fully corrected for lateral drift. He knew that he had made a mistake as he watched the crater floor sliding by on the screen, decided against an attempt to rectify it which, in all probability, would have made matters worse as well as blowing away precious reaction mass. He crossed his fingers and prayed.

Selenite dropped fairly and squarely enough to a three point landing, the foot of each leg of the tripod landing gear making contact with the pumice dust of the crater floor at the same split second. Springs protested, fluid surged in the recoil cylinders. And then she toppled. For what seemed, to those in the rocket, a long time she teetered on one leg of the tripod before, at last, falling. After she had fallen she rolled twenty degrees about her longitudinal axis.

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"Well," said Captain Blair, "we got here."

He had succeeded in staunching the flow of blood from his nose and seemed, now, to be in a somewhat better temper.

"We got here," agreed Langman, the expedition's Radio Officer. "But we can't tell anybody about it."

"Why not, Sparks?"

"The transceiver tore loose from the bulkhead when she rolled and . . . We haven't the spare parts, sir."

"The flare," suggested Matheson.

"The flare," repeated Blair. "The *flare*. You know, Lieutenant, or you should know, that it wasn't loaded after all. Any more than the spare parts for the radio. If my *experienced* Pilot had weighed a few pounds less—then we could have afforded the extra weight."

Matheson — blushing and miserable—looked in silence at the little, scrawny white-haired Captain, at Langman, who could almost have found employment as a circus midget, at Hargraves, the Engineer, who, it was alleged, was wont to clean his venturis by using his own body as a pull-through or pipe cleaner.

"They'll see us with their telescopes," he said.

"They'll see us lying on our side," replied the Captain, "and they won't know if we're alive or dead. And now," he went on, "let's hear nothing more about pilotage. We've all had a piece of Matheson. But he did his best. It has yet to be proved that anybody else could do as well—and if they do, it'll be thanks to *his* experience with this landing. But we're here. We have a bottle with us, the weight of which could better, perhaps, have been made up in spare radio tubes. But, for myself, I'm content to let them worry about us as long as we can drink to this moment in a fitting manner."

The glasses were filled.

"The First Men in the Moon," toasted the Captain.

"The First Men in the Moon," repeated the others.

And as he drained his glass Matheson found himself wondering if the barren, airless world would, in fact, hold something on the lines of the late Mr. Wells' Selenites.

Captain Blair—and this was regarded by the personnel of Satellite One as evidence that he had never really forsaken the sea service in which he had been trained and from which he had transferred to the Space Navy—

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When the guard brought their food, they were ready for him.

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had insisted, with such a contingency in mind, that fathoms of light, nylon line and magnalloy blocks be included in the Moon rocket's stores. Spacesuited, with his spacesuited crew, he sweated and heaved, cunningly placed his purchases, sweated and heaved some more and was, at last, rewarded by seeing *Selenite* standing upright and steady on her landing gear, ready for the take-off.

When this task was done he restrained the others from, at once, dashing off on a tour of exploration. There were, he pointed out, all of thirteen days, Earth days, of sunshine remaining. There was ample time for a rest, a meal, for recuperation from the few hours of labor, heavy even under light Lunar gravity, to which they had subjected themselves.

Matheson, his not inconsiderable belly making its demands felt, agreed with his commander. Sparks and the Engineer were not enthusiastic but, with a bad grace, did as they were told. Even Matheson, catching the infection from them, found himself bolting the tasteless, unsatisfying concentrates when, back in the ship, the four men were sitting in the combined control room and living quarters.

The meal finished, the Captain allowed them one cigarette each. Matheson tried to emulate the Old Man's slow, painfully slow, smoking, but his fingers were burned before Blair's cigarette was half finished. Langman and Hargraves had stubbed out their butts minutes previously.

At last Captain Blair was ready. He pulled on his spacesuit, set the helmet in place and sealed it with a half turn. He waited until the others were dressed for outside then said, his voice tinny in the helmet speakers, "Before we do anything else there's a ceremony." He opened a locker, took out the long case, carried it with him into the airlock. The others crowded in with him. It was a tight fit.

The outer door opened slowly. Blair said—and Matheson thought that he saw a smile on the face half hidden by the helmet—"This, men, is the official landing. The words that we say now are the words that will go down in the history books." He half whispered—"I've often wondered what Julius Caesar *did* say—that 'Veni, vidi, vici' was far too pat . . ."

Slowly, with dignity, the Captain climbed down the

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short, collapsible ladder to the crater floor. Slowly and with, he hoped, as much dignity Matheson followed him. Hargraves was next, and then Langman.

The Captain leading, the four men trudged across the crater floor in silence. The Old Man said nothing, pointed to the small hill, or mound, in the centre of the crater. It was obvious that it was his intention to plant the flag upon the summit of this thousand foot eminence.

Matheson stared through the transparency of his helmet at the black sky, the bright, too bright sun (and that was no more than the briefest of glances), at the misty globe of Earth hanging low over the jagged crest of the mountain range to the southward. He had seen Space before, he had seen Earth and Sun before, from the control rooms of his ferry rockets, from the observation ports of the Satellites. But this was different. Earth, hanging in nothingness, is a sight not easily forgotten. But Earth, with an utterly alien and fantastic landscape in the foreground, is proof that the greatest and most momentous voyage in Man's long history has been made.

He's thinking what he's going to say, thought Matheson, switching his regard from the sky, from Earth, from the mountain range, to the space-suited back before him. He wants it to be something worthy of the occasion. And he'll have our guts for a necktie if we break the spell.

The Captain, now, had reached the hill, was climbing it, planting his feet with a deliberation that showed, that he, like the others, was fighting against the temptations to forget his dignity in the long, ungainly leaps made possible by the light Lunar gravity. Stolidly he plodded on, the flag, in its long case, on its sling, bumping his back. Stolidly Matheson followed, and Hargraves, and Langman. A drop of perspiration ran, with agonizing slowness down Matheson's nose. All I really want, he thought, is to be able to take my helmet off and wipe my face . . .

The Captain reached the summit, turned to face his crew as they completed the climb. It was not long before they were all grouped around him. The Captain pulled the flag, on its staff, from the case. The fabric drooped limply in the absence of atmosphere, of wind. Captain Blair waved it slowly, letting the silk unfold, display briefly the

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white and scarlet and blue, the stars and stripes. He turned, then, to find a suitable spot to plant the staff, cleared his throat—and the noise came crackling through the helmet speakers—preparatory to the dedicatory words.

He was never to say them.

"Hell!" blurted Matheson, pointing to the cairn of stones, the limp, sun-faded strip of crimson cloth, those sons-of-Satan got here first!"

"But it's impossible," said the Captain, a little later, "they haven't got any Satellites. Their guided missiles—and this we know—are at least as good as ours, but they haven't touched the fringe of real astronautics. They . . ."

"How do we know that they haven't taken off directly from the Earth?" asked Matheson.

"We do know. We have the Satellites, and radar. They can't have . . ."

"But they have, Captain."

"It all depends," suggested Hargraves, "on who, or what, you mean by 'They'. Russians, or Martians, or . . ."

"There's a pocket of dust here," said Matheson. "There're footprints. And whoever made 'em seems to have been wearing our idea of a standard spacesuit."

"Did we make those prints ourselves?" demanded Blair. "Can any of you remember walking in that hollow?"

"We didn't," said Matheson. "None of us did, Captain. I'll swear to that."

"But we didn't see any footprints in the dust on our way from the ship."

"No, Captain. But we landed to the north of the crater. The pumice dust in the southern half of it might, for all we know, be covered with prints."

"There's only one way to find out," said the Old Man. "To go and see." Almost absentmindedly he thrust the sharp ferrule of the flagstaff into the cairn of light, porous rocks then, as an afterthought, stiffened to attention and saluted. He said, "I take possession of this world in the name of the people of the United States of America—and the lawyers can work out the rights and wrongs of it when we get back. Come on."

There was little of dignity in the descent from the summit of the hill. The Captain was first back to the crater floor; when his men joined him he was pointing to a long line of evenly spaced depressions in the dust.

"Just one set," he told the others. "Just one set, coming and going. And whoever made

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'em slouched the same way as we were told to, the same way as we're doing. Human, all right. No doubt of it. Is there absolutely no chance, Sparks, of your getting the radio working?"

"Not a hope, sir."

"H'm. Any amount of hard vacuum here. Couldn't you bring the whole works outside — with a power lead, of course, and a hook-up with your suit radio—and make vacuum tubes that are all vacuum with no tube outside? H'm?"

"Got something there, sir."

"Then work on it. Wait—not so fast. Mr. Matheson, you go back to the ship with Mr. Langman. You're quite capable of taking her back to the Satellite yourself. Mr. Hargraves—come with me. Now, Matheson, Hargraves and I are going to try to find out who made these footprints, who made the cairn and planted the red flag on it. If I'm not back in—twenty-four hours, then you have my authority to blast off without us and to return to the Satellite. Give him the camera, Hargraves, he'll be wanting the photographs as evidence. You can delay blasting off, Matheson, if Mr. Langman is about ready to get his message out. But you are not, repeat, not to delay waiting for us. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Don't forget, Matheson, my ship's in your hands now. Come on, Hargraves."

Matheson stood with Langman and watched the Captain and the Engineer follow the strange footprints towards the crater wall and then, skirting the hill, made his way back to the ship.

It was twelve hours later. Matheson and Langman, space-suited, worked in the shadow of the rocket. On the dust was a mess of wiring, of filaments that glowed wanly, of grids that showed marks of repair or improvisation. Matheson touched helmets with Langman—the Radio Officer's helmet set was, of course, hooked up to the untidy rig by the ship and out of action so far as intercommunication was concerned.

"Any luck, yet, Sparks?" asked the Pilot.

"No, Mat. I can hear 'em fine; I can hear Clancy in One nattering to Wilberforce in Two. I can hear—" his clumsy gloved fingers twisted a dial "—Franky Mayne sobbing about the little white cow that died or something. I wish," he said irrelevantly, "that if they must revive stuff they

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wouldn't revive muck like that . . ."

"What now?" asked Matheson.

"Here's the trouble, I *think*. We'll just have to disconnect the transmitter and take it all inside again."

Before returning to the interior of the rocket Matheson carefully inspected every part of the crater floor visible from where he was standing. He thought, as he had thought before, that They, whoever They might be, were massed for the attack behind the central peak. He was tempted to leave Langman to his botchery of tubes and circuits to make a personal reconnaissance and then, as before, decided against it. Captain Blair had left him in charge of the ship. If he were scuppered by the Enemy then Langman, by himself would be helpless. The ship, and the story, had to get back to Satellite One at all costs.

He wished that the range of the helmet sets were not so limited, told himself that if he'd been Old Man he would have arranged a system of relays, admitted that he had been at liberty to propose this to his commanding officer if he had happened to think of it in time—which he hadn't.

Langman was waiting for him in the airlock. Together they stood and watched the outer door close, together they felt their suits pressing in on their bodies as the air pressure rose rapidly from zero to ten pounds. Back in the ship both men removed only their gloves and helmets. The Radio Officer bent once again to his task of repair and manufacture, the Pilot walked restlessly from port to port, staring out through the thick glass at the dazzling, black and white landscape.

"What do you suppose has happened to them?" asked Sparks.

"They've been nobbled," said Matheson. "Whoever it is who's got here first is making sure that it's kept quiet."

"They can't do it," replied Langman. "They know that our people will be sending another rocket to see what's happened to this one. It won't take long to assemble something capable of making the trip at any of the Satellites. Funny that They haven't bothered us yet. We're sitting ducks."

"And we can get up and out faster than any duck ever did," said Matheson as if to reassure himself.

"Talking of getting out," said Langman, "I think that I

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can get a message out now. Give me a hand, will you?"

The two men carefully picked up the panel upon which Langman had mounted his makeshift rig. It was passed down to the airlock without suffering any apparent damage. From the airlock it was passed to the crater floor. As Sparks fiddled with the controls Matheson bent so that their helmets were in contact and so that he could hear what was being said.

"*Selenite* to Satellite One," said Sparks. "*Selenite* to Satellite One. Can you hear me, Satellite One? Over."

Faintly came the answering words—"Come in, *Selenite*. Come in, *Selenite*. We have been worried about you. Over."

"Tell 'em quick what's cooking," said Matheson. "In case . . ."

Something fell on him, knocking Langman and himself face downwards on to the second-time wrecked transceiver. He flailed out wildly, but his assailants were too many and too strong for him. He had a brief vision of a villainous, bearded face inside a transparent, goldfish bowl helmet, another brief vision of Langman being rolled up like a cocoon in fold after fold of dark cloth. Then it was his turn, and in darkness, unable to stir hand or foot, he found himself lifted, carried, placed upon some flat surface. Then came the sensation of flight, a peculiarly undulating flight, even more peculiarly noiseless.

He felt himself being carried again, then he was dropped on a stone floor. The cloth in which he was wound was stripped off, leaving him dazzled and sprawling.

The first place he saw when his eyes were accustomed to the light was that of Captain Blair. The Old Man was helmetless, although still wearing his spacesuit. "I had hoped," he said bitterly, "that you would have had enough sense to get back with the news."

"So they jumped you from kind of flying machine," said Blair. He lit a fresh, pungent cigarette from the stub of the old. "Camel dung," he complained. "I never did like these Oriental blends. But they're better than nothing. H'm. This flying machine of theirs. A rocket?"

"No, sir. If it had been we'd have burned to a cinder when it dropped down on us."

"Some sort of gravity drive, then? But it's impossible. Such things exist only in science fiction."

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"So did artificial satellites and moon rockets only a few years ago."

"H'm. You could be right, at that. Even so, the radar in the Satellites would have picked up any large vessel of metallic construction, no matter how powered."

Matheson helped himself to a cigarette from the ornate brass box. Using the tongs he picked a live coal from the little charcoal brazier, applied it to the end of the little tube.

"But who are these people, sir," he asked. "All this—these cigarettes, the brass box that they're in, the charcoal brazier — seems definitely Eastern. Eastern, not Russian. I'm half expecting the door to open and a troop of eunuchs and dancing girls to come drifting in."

"I don't know about the dancing girls," said the Captain, "but there are several dark complexioned gentlemen outside armed with curved swords who, judging by their size and their rather girlish voices, underwent the same operation as my Aunt Hattie's cat, Percy . . . H'm."

"But what happened to you, sir? Sparks and I have told you all we know."

"In some ways, Matheson, you know a little more than we do. You did find out, for what it's worth, that these people don't use rockets. All that Hargraves and I did was to follow those footprints—right to the crater rim they took us, and right over it. On the far side of the rim, invisible, of course, from inside, the footprints led to a perfectly good airlock door. And, here's an odd point, borne out by your story, there weren't any blast marks on the pumice dust.

"Well, both of us fussed around the airlock door, trying to find some kind of controls. I heard Hargraves say, 'Rum sort of door, sir. Can't see a crack, even.' "

"That's right, sir," agreed the Engineer. "And then I . . ."

"*I* am telling the story, Mr. Hargraves. I heard, over the helmet radio, Hargraves laugh and say, 'Might as well try everything.' And he said, 'Open Sesame.' At this time whoever was watching us from outside took pity on us and the door opened. It shut as soon as we were in the airlock. Hargraves had to say the same gibberish to get the outer door to open."

"A sonic lock, perhaps, sir, tuned to those words?"

"I thought of that, Matheson. The theory's all right to

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explain the opening of the outer door, but not that of the inner one. Anyhow, we went in, and there was no sign of any reception committee. We kept our helmets on—we had no means of testing the air. We wandered along a tunnel for about a hundred yards and then, just for a change, took one at right angles to it. Oh—the lighting. I forgot to mention that. Believe it or not—oil lamps."

"No!"

"Yes. What about this charcoal brazier here? H'm. Well, Hargraves and I pushed on, came at last to a sort of rich curtain hanging over a doorway. There was a sound from inside, which we could hear faintly through our helmets. Some sort of tinkling musical instrument it seemed to be. It seemed to me that our ingression, booted and spurred, as it were, into the middle of a quiet family evening would cause considerable alarm and despondency. We shoved through the curtain."

"And then?"

"And then, you ask. There were scantily clad females scurrying around in all directions like hens in a fox raided run. There were these two big black boys with big, curved swords—and if I hadn't been wearing my helmet I'd have been split from scalp to navel. Incidentally—I must write a report on this fancy plastic they're using for the helmets now. It's good.

"More of the black boys came, and they got us down. One of the brutes found out how my helmet came off and was just about to pass the time with a spot of throat splitting when some old dear—she must be ninety if she's a day—stopped him. I wish I knew what language she was speaking. She deflated that guard like a pin stuck into a balloon.

"They dragged us to this cell, and the old dear tagged along with us. She made 'em bring the cigarettes and the brazier. There was a flask of a rather sweet wine, too . . ."

"There *was*, sir?"

"If we had known you were coming, Matheson, we might have saved you a drop. As it was, one of the guards rushed in and took it away before we'd properly finished."

"What's your idea of all this, sir?"

"What idea can I have, Matheson? This much is obvious—somebody has a very sweet Arabian Nights sort of set-up here, in a pressurized cavern, on the Moon. Harem—and harem guards who are

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qualified for the job. The Russians may be an Oriental people, as we're always being told, but they aren't that Oriental. The Arabs, it must be, one of the Arab states. Don't forget, Matheson, that they were scientists once. There's no reason why they shouldn't be scientists again. H'm. Or now."

"There's somebody outside," said Langman.

All four men turned to look at the door, listened to the key grating in the lock. It swung open slowly, outwards, and by the flickering lamplight the rocketmen saw six huge Negroes, three to either side of the door, each of whom carried a Tommy gun. They said nothing; it was the white man who appeared who said, in an easy, conversational voice with a trace of American accent, "Good morning. I was wondering just when you people were going to get here."

"Who are you?" snapped Captain Blair.

"Has it occurred to you Captain—or should it be Colonel? Those eagles on the collar of your suit could mean either—that I should be asking the questions? Who are *you*, Captain, Colonel or whatever you are?"

"Captain," said the Old Man grudgingly. "Captain Blair. Anglo-American Space Navy. And these are Lieutenants Matheson and Hargraves, with Ensign Langman."

"Thank you, Captain. Now, allow me to introduce myself. Charles Maynor, Technical Advisor to His Highness the Emir Said al Raschid al this, that and the other, Protector of the Faithful in this little corner of the universe, and so on."

"H'm. Technical Advisor? That means that you're the rocket expert."

"Rocket expert? My dear Captain, you people have a mania for rockets. No, Captain—all I do is to look after the maintenance of suits and airlocks, keep an eye on the air conditioning and generally supervise the working of the mines. And that's plenty. Had an assistant once, but he died a year or so ago. Sentimental sort of guy — wanted to be buried in one of the craters. It was his tomb that you stumbled upon."

"But the *rockets!*" the Captain almost screamed.

"I tell you, sir, that we haven't got any rockets. Wouldn't know how to use 'em if we had. That hunk of ironmongery of yours is quite safe as long as you people don't get

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back to it. Whether or not you do all depends upon His Highness."

Matheson studied Maynor carefully as he was talking. Typical mining engineer type, he decided—if there is such a thing as a typical mining engineer. But, as a mining engineer, he would be quite capable of doing the things that he claimed to do—the maintenance of spacesuits and airlocks of the air conditioning plant. And as for the mining—what was being mined? Radium? Uranium? Or—and this fitted in better with the nature of their captors—gold and diamonds?

"How *did* you get here?" asked the Captain again.

"Sorry. Can't tell you. Perhaps His Highness will. I'm to take you to him now."

Maynor led the four rocketeers through what seemed to be a maze of tunnels. Behind them, Tommy guns ready, marched the big Negroes. There was not enough light for the men from Earth to make any sort of cursory examination of their surroundings; the oil lamps were widely spaced and far from efficient. "I could have wired the dump," explained Maynor. "Have electric light in the mines, of course. But His Highness is very old fashioned in some ways."

Matheson, at least, expected that His Highness would prove to be some patriarch in flowing robes and with a long, flowing white beard. But the man sitting at ease in the palatially furnished room into which they were, at last, ushered could not have been more than forty years of age, was clean shaven and was dressed in a style that spoke of Bond Street rather than of the bazaars of Baghdad. He was an Arab—that was obvious—but it was a subtle rather than a crudely obvious racial distinction.

He did not rise to his feet when his guests—or prisoners—entered. He said, "Thank you, Maynor, you may go. Leave the guard posted outside. Captain—you and your officers may seat yourselves."

There were no chairs. The spacemen lowered themselves gingerly on to piles of cushions, acutely conscious of the ludicrous contrast between the silken luxury and their own harshly metallic space arm. The Emir clapped his hands. A girl — young, and rather more than pretty and dressed to reveal rather than to conceal her charms — handed round little cups of black, thick and very sweet coffee,

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cigarettes from an elaborate golden box.

There was a silence, broken at last by the Emir.

He said, "I don't know what I can do about you people. Of course, you're Unbelievers and nobody here, with the possible exception of Mr. Maynor, would think any the worse of me if I were to put you to the sword . . ."

"An unmanned rocket with a plutonium warhead could be sent here just as easily as a manned one," said Captain Blair. "More easily. There'd be no need to worry about fuel for the return journey."

"True, Captain. But aren't you assuming that your people will know, first of all, what has happened to you and, secondly, where to hit us?"

"My Radio Officer got through to the Satellite before you captured him."

"I know. I know, also, just how much was sent."

"All right. So you know. And Satellite One will know that there's something wrong and get Moon Rocket Number Two away in a matter of days."

"And the crew, I suppose," said the Emir, "will follow the footprints that you and your Engineer so obligingly left in the dust. The original footprints, by the way, were left by a slave girl who, if I may be allowed to use a Westernism, was struck on Maynor's assistant. She insisted on going out to plant some sort of charm on his grave to ward off evil spirits. One might say that it does not seem to have worked . . . But these tracks in the dust. The tracks that *were* in the dust . . . They aren't there any longer. And Maynor has a crew camouflaging all the airlock doors. He has suggested to me, too, that we shoot your rocket off by remote control so that when your friends arrive they will find no evidence whatsoever."

"You can't do that," said the Captain.

"And why not, my dear sir? I am the Law, and the representative of the Prophet, here on the Moon. I answer to no man. Oh—I know well that force might be brought to bear, perhaps will be, but have you considered the legal aspects? My people have made a landing here. They have established a self-supporting colony. I can, should I chose to do so, regard you as the spearhead of an invasion in force and appeal to U. N. You know, as well as I know, that certain member states would be delighted to take up arms against the American Alliance

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with every appearance of legality."

"And *you* should remember," said the Captain, "what happened to the Koreans. Release us, let us return to our rocket, let us return and report to our superiors. As you have pointed out, this is a matter for lawyers and diplomats rather than for naval officers."

"But suppose I do not want you to go?"

"Your wishes have no bearing upon the matter. Release us."

The Emir clapped his hands. There entered the six armed guards and with them a gigantic Negro, naked except for a loincloth, who carried a gleaming sword.

"My Executioner," said the Emir. "The sword is, in reality, merely his badge of office. He has other, more interesting, instruments. He is skilled in the technique of protracted killing."

The slim hands were clapped again, sharply. The dozen girls who entered were beautiful, by any standards. Seven of them were fair skinned, and of these five were blonde and two red-headed. Their filmy draperies were ornamental rather than practical. They looked at the spacemen with dull, uninterested eyes. Or, decided Matheson, eleven of them did. The twelfth, a slim blonde, contrived to flash him a message in which hope and misery and appeal were equally mixed.

"You are to make your choice, gentlemen," said the Emir. "Oh, there's no hurry. You have until sunset to make a decision."

"What choice?" demanded Blair.

"The choice between this," said the Emir, waving a languid hand towards the Executioner, "and," his other hand indicated the women, "that."

"And what's the catch?"

"The catch? Oh, I see. Well, Captain, I will be frank, I lack, in my service, experienced spacemen . . ."

"But you got here. H'm?"

"Kindly do not interrupt. With such means as I have at my disposal I am able to maintain this small colony here on the Moon, able to ship gold and gems to my country on Earth, able to ship essential supplies back. But I should like to be able to establish my people on some other world which is capable of supporting human life without all the inconvenience of pressurized caverns, airlocks, spacesuits and the like. I should like to

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do so before you Westerners succeed in wiping all life—the innocent bystander with the belligerent—from the Earth. Mars, the equatorial zone, may be suitable. Venus? We don't know until somebody goes to find out.

"Maynor knows nothing of astronautics. He has nothing to do with the actual business of transport between the Moon and Earth. The . . . pilots whose concern it is dare not risk the voyage from the Moon to Mars. They do not know sufficient of the problems and dangers. Maynor's late assistant, Bellamy, asked my permission to try to reach Mars. He turned back . . ."

"Turned back?" snapped Blair. "Impossible."

"He turned back, Captain. He landed. He died. Thirst, starvation, radiation burns—all contributed to his death. He, like Maynor, was essentially a mining engineer. He had not, like you and your officers, Captain, spent his life considering the problems, the hazards, the ways and means. He had not access to the secret data, the top secret data, which is available to you. There are others among my people who would like to succeed where he failed. But I dare not permit them, knowing what will happen."

"H'm. I begin to see. We are expendable—they are not."

"Not quite, Captain. They are expendable. But had Bellamy not returned my own space fleet would have been depleted—seriously. Any further attempt to reach the planets must be made by somebody who will not, in the attempt, lose the . . . the vessel."

"The first man on Mars," whispered Matheson.

"Matheson!" snapped Blair, "are you considering entering this . . . this bandit's service?"

"Am I?" asked Matheson slowly. "I wonder . . . I suppose that I'm as patriotic as most men, Captain—but I did not enter the Space Navy to serve the dear old flag or to pay homage to any of the other time-worn clichés. I joined the service because of a boyhood ambition—to be the first man on the Moon. I wasn't. By the way, sir," he asked the Emir, "were you?"

"No, Mr. Matheson. The first was my father's Astrologer — and that was all of twenty years ago. There may have been others before him."

Impossible, thought Matheson. Impossible. And yet—these Arabs were, once, scientists and mathematicians of no mean order.

He said, "So I shall never

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be the first man on the Moon. But there's a chance," he turned to the Captain, "can't you see, sir? there's a chance, a good chance, of our being the first men on Mars, or Venus. It's not as though we're selling out to the Russians or the Fifth Reich."

"You forget your oath of allegiance, Lieutenant. When —*when*, I said, Emir—we return you will be dealt with. And I have yet to be convinced that a man who threatens us with torture and who tries to bribe us with women is any better than the Russians or the Germans."

"You have until sunset, Captain Blair. Roughly eleven Earth days and nights. I should apologize, perhaps, for my somewhat theatrical gesture with the Executioner and the dancing girls—but I assure you that Selim may well be instrumental in causing a change of mind should you remain stubborn.

"Until sunset, then, gentlemen—although should a decision be reached before then you are at liberty to inform me."

In spite of Blair's protests the four spacemen were separated. Matheson was hustled along a tunnel, thrown through a door. Before it shut another person entered the room snapped a few words in Arabic to the guards. The door slammed, then, and the key turned in the lock.

Matheson got to his feet, clumsy in the heavy armor, his arm upraised ready to strike the stranger. The blow was never delivered. The Pilot stared at the slight, blonde girl, the one who had looked at him with appeal during the audience with the Emir, and asked, "What the hell are you doing here?"

"I'm American," she told him. "I was with a troupe of entertainers—third rate, we must have been—touring the Middle East. We went broke. I was offered, with two of the other girls, a post as professional dancer to the Emir of Saudi Medina. The pay was good, the conditions fair, the contract legal. And every year —I've been here for three now —that the contract has come up for renewal we have been told that we're at perfect liberty to take the pay that has accrued, and leave. How can we?"

"How did you get here?"

"I don't know. Really, I don't. The coffee was drugged, I think. I went to sleep in the Emir's palace on Earth, woke up in his . . . harem, I suppose you'd call it, here. Oh—there's

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been nothing wrong at all, he's a gentleman and sticks to the contract. Or he has done, until now. But we have been told to do all we can to get the four of you into the Emir's service."

"And if you don't?"

"He has threatened to do the same to us as he did to one of the Arab girls, once . . ." She shuddered.

"What was that?"

"She was taken outside, without a spacesuit naked. We all had to watch."

Matheson looked at the girl. She was telling the truth, of that he was sure. He tried to imagine what she would be like after exposure to vacuum, to the dreadful, unshielded rays of the sun. He didn't much care for the idea.

He sat down on the low divan with which the room was furnished. He motioned to the girl to sit beside him. He said, "Before we go any further, my dear, what is your name? Where do you come from?"

"Ellison," she told him. "Gwyneth Ellison. From Westfield, New Jersey — and pining for the sight and sound of Broadway. I heard what you said about being the first man on Mars and all the rest of it. Me—I just want to be one more girl back in New York.

"And what can I do about it, Gwyneth?"

She got to her feet, moved with a dancer's grace to the door. She peered through the grill. She said, "There doesn't seem to be anybody listening. Well—it's like this. His Highness has promised us all a return to Earth if we can persuade any of you to help him with his plans. Well and good. But can you see him doing it?"

"No. You'd talk."

"I'd give my promise not to . . ."

"And the F. B. I.'d see that you didn't keep it. No—he'd find some way of keeping to the letter of *his* promise, but not the spirit. He'd have you dumped in the middle of the Sahara or at the South Pole."

He got to his feet, started to explore the quarters into which he had been so unceremoniously thrown. There was a largish living room—about twelve feet by twelve feet—and opening off this was a smaller compartment in which were toilet and sanitary necessities, including a shower. The living room, then, was a living cum bedroom. And, thought Matheson, I'm not going to sleep in the bathroom for anybody.

He said, "I suppose you

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realize that we are in very compromising circumstances."

"What if we are?" replied the girl. "The main problem before the meeting is whether or not we return to Earth."

"Or whether or not," replied Matheson, "I'm the first man on Mars. Or whether or not I come up before a court martial and get stood up against a wall and shot for treason, desertion and anything else they can make stick. Anyhow, I'm going to be comfortable. Lend me a hand to get this damned armor off, will you? Yes, that unzips . . ."

He was more at ease in his light shirt and slacks. He helped himself to a cigarette from the box on the low table, lit it with a coal from the brazier. He said, "I suppose they'll keep this thing going for us. And keep the lamps filled with oil as required."

"If the lamps have just been filled,'" she told him, "they'll last as long as we're here helping you to make your mind up. As for charcoal —there's bound to be a supply somewhere. Yes—here we are. By the divan."

"And food? And drink?"

"Are you hungry now?" She found a bell rope among the drapes over the stone wall, gave it a tug. A few seconds later there was a knocking at the door, a black face appearing in the grille. The girl let fly a rapid volley of what the Pilot thought must be Arabic. The face withdrew. It was not long before the key grated in the lock, the door was opened and, escorted by two guards with Tommy guns, a slave brought in a tray upon which were covered dishes, bottles and glasses. He salaamed and withdrew.

"Kid, I hope," said the girl. "With all the trimmings. I asked for kid." She lifted a cover. "Yes, it is. With rice cooked in saffron . . . And half a dozen bottles of lager beer. Or would you rather have Scotch?"

"Beer *with* the meal," said Matheson. "But the mass ratio! How the hell does this Emir of yours do it? We brought just one bottle with us—and the Old Man had to put up a stiff fight to be allowed that much. How does he get all this stuff here?"

"Mass ratio? What do you mean?"

"Just that the payload of a rocket is severely limited. Necessities you can carry, but not luxuries."

"I'll say this for His Highness," said the girl, "there's never been any shortage of

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either necessities or luxuries here."

"But how does he do it?"

"I don't know. But I'm hungry. I thought that you said that you were."

A satisfying meal, two beers, one cigarette and three stiff slugs of Scotch later Matheson was feeling far more at peace with the world —or the Moon. Gwyneth Ellison was curled up on the divan beside him like a blonde kitten. He distrusted her motives and was still far from sure as to whose side she was on—but there was a certain animal comfort from her presence. Even so, he thought, there was a Rubicon he would not cross no matter how great the temptation. He allowed himself to wonder how the Old Man, the Radio Officer and the Engineer were making out. He found himself thinking of the fate that would be his if he refused to co-operate with the Emir—hastily tried to push the disturbing thought to the back of his mind.

"Tomorrow?" he murmured. "Tomorrow? Why, tomorrow I may be myself with yesterday's seven thousand years . . ."

"What was that, honey?"

"A passing thought. An unpleasant one. Why worry about it? I'm enjoying this—although it'd pall after a time."

"*Would* it?"

"Don't bite. I'm enjoying this, as I said—but I allowed myself to think of the consequences of refusing to play ball."

"But you will play ball?"

"I'm not so sure. The old boy almost had me sold on the prospect of being the first man on Mars and all the rest of it —but then I was hungry, thirsty and tired. Now I'm just about back to normal, rather better than normal, as I have a change from my own charming company. Tell me, what are the chances of escape?"

"Slim. Apart from anything else, we shall need space-suits to get to the rocket"

"I've got mine—but no helmet. Where does the Emir keep *his* ships?"

"I don't know."

"Is his landing ground far from here? The Captain was saying that there were no signs of a spaceport."

"As far as I can remember," said the girl, "I was carried straight from the ship into the women's quarters. But I was still more than half doped. I was wearing a space-suit—that much I can remember."

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"What can you remember about the ship?"

"Nothing. I've told you that before. Nothing."

Matheson got up from the divan, pulled the heavy, ornate hangings aside from the nearest wall.

"Looks like a sort of pumice," he said. "Should be easy enough to chew through it."

"Using what?"

The Pilot picked up one of the empty beer bottles, holding it by the neck. He brought it down sharply on the edge of the low table. What remained in his hands was either a tool of sorts or a dangerous and vicious weapon—

"This," he said, "should do."

The door opened sharply. One of the giant Negroes entered. With his left hand he dealt Matheson a cuff that knocked him sprawling, with his right hand he snatched the broken bottle. Another Negro, armed, stood in the doorway and watched as the first guard removed the broken glass, the unbroken bottles, full as well as empty. While Matheson watched him sullenly the room was hastily stripped of everything that could be used as a tool or a weapon. The door slammed. The key turned once again in the lock.

"Some people," said the girl, "are clever. Some people just throw away the raw materials for a pleasant hour or so of getting quietly pickled. That was the first Scotch I've seen since I came here."

"They're smarter than I thought," admitted the Pilot.

"Well, they got the Moon before you," the girl reminded him.

She helped him to his feet, dusted him off, asked, "What now, Captain Future?"

"Before we go any further," he demanded, "let's get this straight. Whose side *are* you on? Ours, or the Emir's? I promise you this, if I get out of here, you come with me. It's just a question of getting to the *Selenite*, and off."

"I'm on your side," she said slowly. "I'm on your side, as long as there's reasonable chance of our getting back to Earth. But, and you get this straight, little Gwyneth has no intention of being thrown outside without a spacesuit."

"If that's the way you feel about it," he answered, "I'll do my best to strangle you or break your neck if things look hopeless.'"

"Decent of you. Anyhow, it's a change from being threatened with a fate worse than death."

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"Will you be with me if we try again when they bring in the next meal?" asked Matheson.

"Maybe," she said. "I want to hear first what your plan is."

The plan was simple enough — simple, and, perhaps, foolhardy. Matheson was banking heavily on one factor—that he, a newcomer to the Moon, would of necessity be both stronger and faster than the slaves who, presumably, had spent years upon the satellite. He asked Gwyneth if the Emir had any system of regular leave, whereby the personnel of the little colony would return to Earth at regular intervals, and was told that this was not the case.

The girl rang the bell, told the slave who looked through the grille that she and the Pilot were hungry. When the order had been passed along Matheson, first making sure that he was not being observed from the tunnel outside, succeeded in jumping up to the narrow ledge on top of the doorway. It would have been impossible for any but a trained athlete to have clung there under Earth-normal conditions of gravity. It was far from easy even on the Moon. The pilot managed to get his finger nails into slight irregularities of the rock and hung there, sweating and quivering with muscular and nervous strain.

At last came the welcome sound of heavy footsteps along the tunnel and the noise of the key turning in the lock. Matheson managed to look down, saw the big man with the loaded tray slowly enter the room. He dropped and as he fell realized that he had made his first mistake. He fell slowly, so slowly that he hit the slave only a glancing blow instead of the heavy one that he had intended.

But it was enough. The slave pitched forward with a clatter, his face in a steaming mess of rice and meat.

Catlike, Matheson regained his feet, whipped around to face the two guards who, Tommy guns drawn, were rushing forward to the assistance of their fellow. One of them staggered back when hit full in the face by a large metal bowl flung by the girl. The pilot dived for the other, tackling low, and brought him down with a clatter. The gun skidded over the stone floor of the tunnel.

Matheson jumped for it, grabbed it. With it he menaced the guard who had

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dropped it. The huge Negro clambered slowly to his feet, advanced with shoulders hunched and arms hanging low. His big white teeth were bared in a snarl.

"Stop," shouted the Pilot. "Stop! I don't want to have to shoot you!"

Behind the man the other, recovered from the blow on the face was trying to get himself into a position from which he could fire without injuring his mate.

"Gwyneth!" called Matheson, "tell these stupid clots that we don't want to hurt them!"

"They're more scared of the Emir than of you," she said quickly.

She lifted a knife—and its blade, Matheson noticed, was already bloody—and slid it into the back of the man with the gun. She withdrew it quickly, before her victim had fallen, stabbed the unarmed man in the back.

Matheson felt sick. He looked at the bodies of the two guards, of the slave who had carried the meal. He said, slowly, "Was *that* necessary?"

"Yes. I'm telling you now, all these people dread the airless death. More than we do, perhaps, because to them it is some horrible kind of magic. They'll all die, every one of them, rather than fail to carry out their duties."

"I don't like it," said Matheson.

"That's just too bad," she snapped. "And I'll have you know that there's no going back for me, now. What *I* get, if they catch me, will be a million times worse than a knife between the ribs."

"I suppose you're right." The Pilot knelt by the body of one of the guards. "Would this be the key to the cells?"

"It would. And I suggest we try the next three doors and release the others."

The next three doors were opened.

The Captain was alone—"They put some shameless young hussy in with me," he growled, "but I had her chased out." The Engineer and Radio Officer each had a girl with him. The two girls were Americans.

Blair took charge at once.

"Where are the spacesuits?" he barked at Gwyneth Ellison.

"I don't know," she said. "I *think* . . perhaps along this tunnel."

"Anyhow, we're armed. Pick up that other gun, Mr. Matheson. Rest of you grab knives."

"We want nothing to do

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with this," whined one of the girls.

"You're in it, Mary," said Gwyneth Ellison, "whether you like it or not. If you back out . . ." she gestured to the bodies of the Negroes . . . "you know what to expect."

"You wouldn't," whimpered the girl, appealing to Matheson,

"*He* wouldn't, perhaps," said Gwyneth. "And, regarding these, he didn't. I did."

There was no more argument and the party got under way, proceeding along the tunnel with more haste than discretion. It must have been, Matheson decided afterwards, a sleep period. Otherwise the guard posted at the door of the room in which the Emir's spacesuits were kept would have been alert, not dozing on his feet. Langman and Hargraves rushed him, the Captain clipped him, hard, behind the ear with the muzzle of his gun. Nobody bothered to ascertain if he were dead or merely unconscious. Blair made a hasty inspection of the body to try to find keys, found, dangling from the man's belt, an ornate affair of polished brass that seemed to match the heavy door with its ornate brass studs and hinges.

The room beyond the door was in darkness, but Matheson snatched an oil lamp from the wall just outside, carried it in. The suits, at least two dozen of them, were hanging stiffly from pegs. All the men had discarded their own space armor—the helmets of which had been, in any case, removed by their captors—and so lost no time in climbing into the Emir's spacesuits. The three girls took longer, but they knew how the helmets were secured in place.

The gloves were too clumsy to allow the use of firearms, so, reluctantly, the guns were abandoned. The knives were retained. Finally, the still unconscious guard was dragged into the room outside which he had stood sentry and locked in.

The next guard, around a bend of the tunnel, was wide awake—but in the gloom, barely relieved by the inadequate lighting, he did not realize that he was beset by enemies until it was too late. His gun was knocked from his hands by heavily gloved fists, the same fists beat at his face and head. His mouth opened as though he were crying out, but only a small muffled noise penetrated the helmets of the spacesuits. Suddenly he dropped, slumped in a fast spreading pool of blood. Lang-

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man looked with horror at the knife in his hand, dropped it beside the dead man. Blair snorted, the noise of it faintly audible to the others, and picked up the weapon. He remained kneeling, pawing at the man's belt in an attempt to discover the key to the guarded door.

There was no key.

The little Captain stood erect, spread his hands in a gesture of despair. Matheson repeated the gesture—and as he did so he saw, through the transparent glass of the goldfish bowl helmet, Hargrave's lips moving. The silly guy, he thought, he should know that we can't hear him.

And the door opened, with a slow, uncanny deliberation.

It was the door to an airlock, an absurdly large airlock. Matheson brought a lamp in from outside, but even then most of the compartment was in shadow. There was a door similar to the one by which they had entered. On one wall were hanging six large carpets —all with the same geometrical design, all faded and frayed with age. On another wall, there were pressure gauges.

The carpets didn't make sense. Unless, thought the Pilot, they were moth infested and it was hoped that exposure to hard vacuum would destroy eggs and larvae.

Once again, Hargraves was speaking, and as he spoke, soundlessly so far as the helmeted men and girls were concerned, the inner door shut and the outer door opened. The light from the harsh, black and white landscape outside was dazzzling. Blair rushed out, leading the party. Hargraves grabbed the Captain's arm, touched helmets with him, appeared to be making some suggestion. The Captain shook him off impatiently. The Engineer then approached Matheson who, with Gwyneth Ellison, was following hard on the heels of the commanding officer.

"The carpets, Matheson," he said urgently, "The carpets. Give me a hand to get 'em out of here and back to the ship!"

"Why? They're not worth anything."

"They are, I tell you, they are."

"Rubbish."

Ahead of them, Blair was gesticulating impatiently.

Hargraves went to the wall, dragged down the six carpets. He bullied the two girls into helping him to roll them, swung two of the unwieldly bundles on his own shoulder

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and staggered out into the blazing sunlight, followed by his helpers. He and the two girls tried to follow Blair, Matheson, Langman and Gwyneth Ellison up the steep crater wall but, hampered as they were, kept sliding back and falling.

Matheson waited until the Engineer had caught up with him, then touched helmets and said, "In the name of Heaven, drop the bloody things."

"All right. I will. It'll take 'em some time to find them in this crevasse."

Matheson wondered briefly how many thousands of feet the carpets fell before they touched bottom.

Up the crater wall toiled the seven refugees, up and over, and across the level, dusty plain to the bright silver ship just beyond the central hill.

When the first signs of pursuit appeared, spacesuited figures pouring over the crater rim, work had already begun on the dumping of surplus stores and equipment to make allowance for the extra weight of the three women. When the cumbersome rocket projector was set up the warming blasts were already licking through *Selenite's* venturis. When the first projectile burst—a matter of three yards or so short —Hargraves had reported to Captain Blair that all was ready. When the second projectile hit, it hit where the spaceship had been only a split second previously. The third shot from the rocket projector, fired as it was at a fast moving target, missed by miles.

"You and your looting," snapped Blair. "I could break you for this, Hargraves. I will break you. By your irresponsible souvenir hunting you delayed us all and almost had us either recaptured or killed."

The Engineer's face was pale.

"I didn't endanger us, sir. I saved us. They could pursue only on foot."

"Rubbish."

"It's not rubbish, sir. It was the airlock doors gave me the clue. The way I got 'em to open and shut. I said 'Open, Sesame,' and, 'Close, Sesame.' "

"H'm. And what bearing has *that* on your defense? Sonic locks?"

"Plenty, sir. It's all part of the pattern. Remember what Matheson and Langman told us about their capture. Ask these girls to tell you how they were brought here—drugged, and wearing spacesuits. Just call to mind how keen the

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Emir was to have us in his employ as people capable of planning a voyage to Mars or Venus. It all adds up."

"It all adds up to looting, Mr. Hargraves, that's all I can see."

"And more, sir," put in Matheson. "I can see what he's driving at. I wish I'd seen before—I'd have given a hand with those carpets."

"*Blast* the carpets."

"But you must see, sir, what Hargraves did. It's so obvious."

"Well, what did he do?"

"He threw the carpets down a deep crevasse. He gave us time to get to our own ship. And . . ." the Pilot grinned reminiscently, memories of his childhood reading flickering through his mind ". . . he put *their* spaceships out of commission until such time as they manage to get them up out of that hole!" **THE END**

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CONQUERING HERO

By MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY

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A taut and touching story of a boy who was more than he should be . . . and who posed a question of conscience to himself . . . and to the world.

THE boy sat in an upper room of the white farmhouse, looking across the expanse of yellowed August pasture that sloped gently upward to the mountains. There were a few dairy cows, no larger at this distance than black-and-white dogs, grazing listlessly on the weathered

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herbage; he extended an idle thought toward them, in much the same manner that a man preoccupied with an important problem will pat the dog beside his chair; languidly enjoying the dulled and blunted impact they made on his peculiar consciousness.

At other times, Myron Cameron enjoyed experimenting with this odd sense of contact, but at the moment it was no more than a peripheral awareness. The main portion of his attention flowed downstairs, where his father, their family doctor, and a stranger had just come in at the front door.

Myron's room was at the back, his window facing away from the road, and the thick-beamed walls of the old farmhouse muffled the sound of opening and closing doors to a mere creak which might have been part of the background noises of the farm; but Myron did not particularly need either sound or sight. He practised looking at things, and listening to them, attentively and conscientiously; Dr. Fisher had once seriously warned him that these functions, unused, might atrophy. But the peculiar senses that were his own needed neither sight nor sound and had none of their limitations. He felt the impact of the three persons like a physical touch; the familiar pulse of his father (a warmth, almost a sound, friendly even at a distance and even when he was not thinking of his son), the almost-equally familiar touch of Dr. Fisher whom he had known for most of his seventeen years. He sensed the newcomer too, and without really knowing how he did it, analyzed the impact in a fashion as personal as physically running a hand over the strange face, the strange body, the unknown personality.

A woman! Probably another doctor! I'm tired of being on display like a scientific exhibit! If I'm a sideshow freak, I should at least have the fun of seeing the circus!

He started toward the door of the bedroom, just a fraction of a second before his father called up the stairs:

"Myron?"

(Is that boy roosting up there in his room again? What on earth does he find to do? He spends too much time . . . too introspective . . .)

Myron abandoned the eddy of his father's thoughts, and called, "All right, Dad, just a

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minute." He bent over an old-fashioned bureau, peering into the too-low mirror, and jerked his tie straight. The expression of his face was sullen but not otherwise unhandsome; the dark face, big-nosed and strong-chinned, of a well-grown boy of seventeen. He pulled a perfunctory comb through black untidy hair, randomly wandering in thought across the barnyard again;

That cow's wandering around. I'd better let Dad know so he can have Bud take her to the bull. I won't take her again. Too . . . uncomfortable. Upsetting . . . heck, I'd better get downstairs. He opened the door, the queer pulse in his nerves deepening as he descended the stairway. The newcomer was not like his father or like Dr. Fisher, and the difference was in some way disturbing. Could she be another telepath? He shrugged away the thought with amused arrogance, *I'm unique, they say,* and did not look up as he came through the door into the living room; but it burst on him again so overwhelmingly that he actually went white and caught his lower lip between his teeth.

It did not occur to him to look at the woman. Sight would only have added irrelevance to her personal impact. He saw Dr. Fisher's eyes on him, and made himself relax, as his father said, "Miss Robson, my son Myron. Myron, I'd like you to meet a friend—"

"A young colleague of my own," interrupted Dr. Fisher, and Myron caught the tail end of his thought, *I hope she remembers not to offer him her hand . . .*

((But is this the boy I've read so much about, the telesper? Why, he's only a good-looking kid, nothing freakish about him at all. Why his father should be so stubborn . . .)) "How do you do, Myron. I've heard a good deal about you from Dr. Sams. You remember Dr. Gilbert Sams from St. Martins?"

Myron overcame his first impulse—to answer the unspoken comment, not the polite speech. But his father had lectured him severely about showing off his powers, and while his father's opinion was not a matter of much moment to Myron, his father's anger — or anyone's else — made Myron physically uncomfortable. So he only said gravely, "I'm happy to meet you, Dr. Robson."

"Miss Robson, please. I'm not in practice, and I never

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use the 'doctor'." ((His eyes are so blank. Is he blind, I wonder?))

With an effort, Myron focussed his eyes and said tartly, "No, Miss Robson, I see very well when I choose." As if humoring a child or an animal, he stared directly at her, but as his father's expected annoyance reached him, he bit his lip and added in apology, "You see, I feel people so well without looking at them that I sometimes forget." He hesitated, then "—in this case, it's a pleasure."

Doris Robson blushed. She was a small and round woman with very fair skin that betrayed her blushes much too easily, though her manner was one of professional poise. As she felt herself blushing, Myron physically recoiled at her blast of self-directed rage, ((stop it, you dope! He's just a schoolboy showing off!)) but aloud, she only said with a cool smile, "Thank you, Myron. I consider that a great compliment. I've been looking forward to meeting you."

"Miss Robson will be staying for the week end, Myron," his father broke into the silence, and he seemed displeased about something, "Will you take her suitcase up to the corner room—and then tell Bess that there'll be four for supper?"

"Pass Miss Robson the chicken, Myron," Guy Cameron reminded his son, and Doris Robson laughed. She had changed into a white sweater dress, and brushed her blonde hair into loose curls, and Guy Cameron thought she looked no older than the boy across the table.

"You underestimate your son's perceptions, Professor Cameron. He helped me to white meat just before I had a chance to ask him to pass the platter."

"I've asked him not to show off," Guy Cameron said briefly.

"You're not particularly realistic, then," Doris said, and smiled across the table at Myron. "I haven't had a country-style chicken dinner in years."

"Bess is a fine cook," Dr. Fisher agreed, leaning back in his chair, "her dinners always make me want to let out my belt buckle half a dozen notches. I suspect she tries to live up to that reputation when I come to dinner. No, thanks, Myron, no more."

Myron was not listening. Dr. Fisher took the platter and self-consciously helped himself to another drumstick.

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"I *said* I always make a pig of myself when I come here."

"I suppose they're your own chickens?"

Guy Cameron glanced at Myron, who had dropped his fork with a clatter to the floor. The boy, with a muttered excuse, retrieved the fork and went through the kitchen door, and Guy Cameron said curtly, "No."

"I didn't—" Doris fell silent as Myron came through the door again, loaded with a tray of dessert plates. He handed them expertly round. "I thought I'd save Bess the trouble," he said, and, as he resumed his seat, asked, "Are you a medical doctor or a psychiatrist, Miss Robson?"

((How did he know? Oh, of course.)) "Neither, at present. I do have a medical degree, but at present I work out of the Department of Applied Psychology at St. Martins College. Part of my work is to interview and evaluate students before they are admitted to the college."

Myron looked round quickly at his father. "Dad! Does this mean you've decided to let me go away to college?"

Guy Cameron shook his head. "I'm not certain, Myron," he said quietly. "I haven't completely decided."

But he had, and in the backlash of his refusal, Myron exploded. "Well, I have! I've told you I'm entering college this fall—whether you like it or not!" He stopped, surprised by his own fury. This anger was like an unwelcome guest he carried around within himself, and this time it went deeper than the refusal he sensed in Guy Cameron. Once in a while he struck a blurred patch in his father's thoughts, and almost always it dealt with this recurrent question of leaving the farm. Whenever it happened, Myron found himself tightening up with rage; he forced his fingers to unclasp their grip on the arm of his chair, and tried to steady his breathing.

Doris Robson tried to ease the situation by saying, "That's partly why I'm here, Myron. I've brought a series of tests along. On their basis, perhaps we can determine whether you can be admitted to St. Martins as an extension student." His face struck her as somehow pathetic and she added pleasantly, "Possibly even as resident student. We'll discuss that later."

Myron sighed. The recoil of that old reasonless rage always left him pliant and for some reason exhausted. "If I

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had a dime for every test I've taken, I'd be able to buy out the Texas oilfields. But okay, bring on your tests. One more won't matter."

Late the next day, Doris Robson, Dr. Fisher and Guy Cameron sat staring at a series of examination papers, written in the typical scrawl of an adolescent who is not interested enough in his penmanship to improve it beyond the very basics of legibility. Doris tapped one paper with the tip of a pencil.

"If this meant anything, Myron would be the genius of the century. But it doesn't."

Guy Cameron said, with a very slight shrug, "I told you so."

Dr. Fisher leaned over the woman's shoulder to inspect the papers. "I don't quite understand—"

Doris handed him one of the scribbled sheets. "It's a perfect set of papers, as far as it goes. Every answer correct where there is a choice between a right answer and a wrong one. But this question here, for instance—" she pointed with the tip of her finger, "deals with a subject about which my knowledge is limited, to say the least. The ordinary college entrant would have ignored the question. Myron carefully copied into his answer every one of my personal misconceptions on the subject—word for word."

"Which I call an uncommon dirty trick," said Myron angrily, opening the library door behind them. Doris Robson met his eyes with a level stare.

"The purpose of the test, Myron, was to determine *your* knowledge and intelligence—not mine."

Myron carefully closed the library door, stepping inside. He sat down on the edge of a straight chair and said, "Correct me if I'm wrong, Miss Robson, but I always believed that the real reason for a test was to determine an individual's knowledge in functional relationship to his environment. If I *have* the knowledge, does it matter whether I get it from a page in a book, or from the mind of someone who has read the book? I'm getting it second-hand in either case. In that sense of the word I'll never need to take a test or an examination. When you try to measure me that way, it's a little like insisting that a man with good hearing must put on earmuffs before he goes to a concert, to make him equal to the tone-deaf man."

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((Not a bad argument. He's intelligent enough.))

"Dad?"

The annoying blank patch appeared again in Guy Cameron's thoughts. He only said aloud, "We've been over this before, Myron. I don't see any sense—"

Doris Robson said gently, "Myron, I'm sorry. You're very intelligent, and as you say, you have sources of information which aren't available to the average person. You certainly deserve the best education possible, but it would be unwise to admit you to St. Martins or to any other college as a resident student. We'll admit you to the extension division, and if you wish, we can arrange to send a private tutor to you every week or so. That's about as far as we can go."

Myron stood up, and Doris got the impression of a snapping bowstring. "You're afraid!" he challenged, "you're not willing to let me in because you know that within a week, I'd know as much as all the faculty put together! You keep me locked up here because you're afraid of what I'd do to your petty little world!"

The woman stared in shocked amazement. Dr. Fisher said patiently, "Myron, we've never locked you up . . . . we advise you to stay here for your own good, and you know it. You know how difficult it is for you to adjust to new people. You're upset with Miss Robson here—"

"I am not upset!" Myron shouted at them, then gulped and lowered his voice. "Sorry. I didn't—but it's so unfair. I'm not bragging when I say I'm a genius. Good Lord, you've measured my intelligence often enough!"

"No one is denying that," said Doris. ((A genius, surely, but he has the reactions of any normal adolescent in a situation of frustration. Being kept in isolation would make any boy neurotic, but—))

"Then why not let me out of isolation?" Myron had the familiar sensation of beating his head against a wall. It occurred to him, as at times to every teen-ager, that for intelligent adults, his father and Dr. Fisher were childishly unreasonable. He appealed to the woman:

"You understand it's not right for anyone to be isolated."

"I do understand that. But unfortunately, there's nothing to be done."

Myron walked to the li-

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brary window. He clasped his hands behind his back, and the adults in the room could see, from the tension on those fingers, all the strain in him. There was a most curious air of oppression in the big room. Dr. Fisher was frowning; Cameron's face was drawn with deep distress, and Doris Robson, looking through the motes in the dusty sunlight, saw the lines around his eyes and mouth bite deeper and darker. He started to speak to his son, then sighed and was still.

Myron swung suddenly around. "What I want to know is this," he said, with terse, too-controlled emphasis. "In a few years, I'll be twenty-one. What then, Dad? Until then, I remember you're my legal guardian." He looked at his father with a strange, impersonal glance that was almost dislike. "But the day I'm twenty-one, I can walk out of here, free and clear, and you can't stop me. Since it's got to come some day, why not start now? Is there something terrible about me? Why should anyone be afraid of me?"

"No one is afraid of you," Dr. Fisher said.

"Dad is," Myron accused, "he said once that I had powers no other human possessed. He's afraid I'd use them to get ahead of all the other homo stupids!"

"Myron—son, for Heaven's sake—"

"Your grand human race trying to imprison the next forward step in evolution! It's nothing but selfishness!"

Dr. Fisher got up from his chair. "You've been reading too much lurid fiction, I'm afraid."

"Rubbish. I never read fiction."

Doris asked quietly, "What *do* you like to read?"

"Anthropology — don't try to divert me! For your information, I can out-think any psychologist."

Doris smiled at his angry face. "I'll trust to your own native intelligence then. Do you remember your first day at school?"

He stared, first incredulous, then amused. "I've never been to school. I've never been off the farm, except for a few times when Dad and I drove back into the mountains. My mother taught me to read, and after she died, Dad and Dr. Fisher went on where she left off. Dr. Sams came here and lived for a year when I was thirteen. He said it was worth the trouble, just to have a genuine telepath to ex-

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periment on. That was *his* word—experiment."

"Dr. Sams thinks very highly of you." ((He said Myron was a nice boy and his tele-esper was a handicap, not a gift. He also said he had the most dangerous potential of any human mind—))

"I'm aware of old Sammy's opinion," Myron chuckled. "He told me all that and a lot more, not half so complimentary. So don't be tactful."

"But," Dr. Fisher said, "you still don't remember going to school."

A vein in Myron's temple was throbbing. "I tell you, I never—"

"You did," Cameron said. "You were only six, but—"

"But nothing! Dad, you know my memory's eidetic, I couldn't possibly have forgotten that." He repeated, "I tell you, I've only been away from the farm two or three times. The day we drove back into the mountains toward the—"

"Wait," Guy Cameron interrupted. The lines around his mouth were deep and strained, "you won't believe me when I say it, but you've got ways of knowing whether I'm telling the truth. Look and see."

Myron's face twitched. For a moment he looked as old as the tense man facing him. "I don't understand you. I couldn't forget. Look, I can remember anything I ever did, everything I ever saw. Pick out a day. *Any* day. I'll tell you everything I did, the color of the shirt I wore, every page of every book—" their faces stopped him. He reached blindly for the one assurance that never failed him, the telepathic reach into his father's mind, but found only a blurring blankness. He stared, the whites of his eyes clearly visible all round the pupil, his hands gripped tight on the back of a chair.

"You're learning to hide things from me, Dad! How do you—I've never—" he choked over a sudden thickness in his larynx, stopped; he was aware of an irregular thudding in his chest. He wet his lips with his tongue and said hoarsely, "What is this, a joke? Dad, are you trying out some new kind of gimmick to blank your mind?"

Wordlessly, Guy Cameron shook his head, and Myron found that he could read his father's thoughts again: not in words this time, but a sort of puzzled pity and regret that added to, rather than easing Myron's tension.

Through the blurring of strain he heard Doris Rob-

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son's urgent voice, "Myron, it doesn't *matter! Listen* to me —I tell you, it doesn't matter!"

He could not have told whether he heard the words or whether they penetrated through the fogbound murk that was the failure of his special senses, but he let out a shaky breath and focussed his eyes on her. In the dusty sunlight her face was a pale blob fuzzed around with gilt. She said, laying her hand lightly on his arm, "Loss of memory is nothing very serious."

Myron muttered, "When it's my memory—"

"Perhaps someone is mistaken." ((Right now, the important thing is to get off the subject!)) She bent over Guy Cameron's rolltop desk, picked up the test papers and slipped them into her small brief case, then tossed the brief case back on the desk and pushed her hands through her curls. "Right now, —Mr. Cameron, I'm dying to explore your beautiful farm. Myron, could I persuade you to give me a guided tour?"

Myron flushed, awkwardly conscious of the scene he had made and the smoothness with which she had handled him. Resentment battled with a desire to gain back her esteem, and lost. "I'd be happy to, Miss Robson."

Blithely she put her arm through his. "Won't you call me Doris?"

"I—I'd like to. But would that be—"

"It's all right if I say so." ((The important thing is to put him at ease—oh, damn, he's probably listening in on me right now. But maybe I can make him understand—at his age it's natural to rebel against fathers, family doctors and such like—)) she drew him along out of the room, not seeing the little puzzled frown reappear between Myron's thick brows.

On a hilltop that overlooked half a dozen fields, Doris Robson paused, out of breath. "Can't we stop and sit down a minute?" ((It's easy to see he's not used to walking with girls!)) "You walk too fast for me—in these heels!"

"I'm sorry, Miss—er—Doris." Myron slowed, annoyed with himself, for now when she called it to his attention he realized why he had been so much in a hurry to leave the pasture. It was a new feeling, to have to control his thoughts in the presence of another, and to cover his feeling of confusion he said quickly, "Would you

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care to know what I was thinking about before you came yesterday?"

"I'd like to know." ((I'd really give a lot to know what he's thinking now, but I don't imagine I'm far wrong. Maybe I should tell him I'm a farm girl myself and know all about the cows and the bulls—))

She looked up, startled, at Myron's burst of shy laughter, then, seeing the slow color rising in his face, she realized what had happened. She started to say something casual, but Myron interrupted quickly, "Sorry—Dad and Doc think I'm nuts because I laugh at nothing every now and then—what I started to say was, I have a theory about myself."

"About your tele-esper?"

"Not exactly. I'll leave that to the medical profession. Old Sammy, I expect, would enjoy dissecting me. No—I mean, why it is that I can sense a physical presence and tell whether it's someone I know, or a stranger, or—"

"Or a man or a woman? That didn't take any thought-reading, Myron." ((He puts me at a total loss, how on earth do you handle a youngster who knows exactly what you're thinking, and why?))

"I suggest," said Myron gently, "—by taking it for granted."

"Oh — excuse me." The flush crept up her face this time. "I suspect you'd make an efficient psychoanalyst yourself, given time."

He laughed a little. "Well —you know what I'm thinking without telepathy. I'm only trying to show you what it feels like—"

"Disconcerting, I should imagine. But tell me your theory, won't you?"

"Well, if you're really interested, I believe it's a question of auras."

"That sounds like spiritualism, isn't it?"

"I don't know anything about spiritualism. I think people have auras — electromagnetic fields which extend around them. Maybe when people come within a certain distance of me, their electromagnetic field touches mine."

"That's not a very technical explanation, is it?"

"I haven't had the opportunity for a technical education!" said Myron with a flare of annoyance. "So far, it's just a theory!"

"Does there seem to be any difference between people you know, and strangers?"

"Oh, yes. A terrific difference." Some of Myron's tension lessened as he tried to

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explain to the woman. "And there's a critical distance, too. If I'm not thinking about a person, I can sense them—I mean, him or her—at about a hundred feet, while if I try, I can sense—"

"Sense? That's an odd word to use." ((And his eyes have blanked out again. He's stopped seeing me.)) "Why don't you say feel—or perceive, or—" ((or touch?))

Myron brought his eyes into focus again, with an effort. "As far as I know, only five senses have been given names, and I have a couple of odd ones that haven't been labeled yet. Maybe perceive would be better. Although it resembles touch more than any of the other senses."

Doris idly picked up a pebble and tossed it over the fence. "How do you know it's magnetic in character?"

Myron deliberately withdrew from the tangle of association-chains which the word *magnetic* had set up in her mind. "It's similar to an electric shock. With persons I know, it's mild and rather pleasant. With strangers, it can be painful."

"So Dr. Sams said." ((Is that the reason they keep him isolated here??))

"That's what they tell me," Myron answered the unspoken thought, "—but after a very short time I get used to any contact. You don't bother me now—oh . . . I didn't mean that the way it sounded, Doris—"

"I know that." She laughed. "I wonder what the crucial distance is?" She turned and walked away. "Tell me when you become unconscious of my aura, if that's what you call it."

Myron's eyes slid shut and he was no longer directly aware of her voice. After a time, the feeling that was like a physical touch diminished, then stopped; he opened his eyes to discover that she was at the far end of the meadow, nearly out of sight. He called out, "Hold it!"

She started to walk back, but he called, "Stay there! I want to try something," and began to walk toward her. She saw, as he neared, that his eyes were shut, and wondered how he managed to avoid obstacles in his path. Abruptly, when he was about ten feet from her, he opened his eyes. He looked excited.

"Hey, I can pull in my aura!"

"Pull in your what? Oh—how?"

His face darkened. "I can't really explain. It's a—a pull-

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ing in, like a shutting out—oh, it's no good trying, there aren't any words. But I didn't feel you, that time, until I was real close."

His excitement carried her along on its crest. "See if you can sense me when I'm trying not to think of you," she suggested, turning away again.

Half an hour later, her eyes glowed as she rejoined him for the fourth time. "I think maybe you've got something here."

He lowered himself to the yellowed grass, carefully brushing away an accumulation of twigs from a flat rock for Doris to sit down. "Because you'll have something new to tell old Sams?"

"You read me like a book!" She made a face at him, "Partly that, partly because you're excited and pleased."

Myron's eyes blurred into unfocus again. This was new to him. He was used to his father's protective kindness, grateful for it even when he resented it most; used to the mingled curiosity, wonder and hostility of the various scientists he had met. But—he sensed this without understanding it—Doris liked him for himself, not because he was a freak. And she was really sharing his own interest in this discovery . . .

She poked him in the ribs with her finger. "Myron, wake up!" she chuckled, "I'm not used to having people go glassy-eyed on me when I'm talking!"

"Oh, sorry—just an absent-minded habit, I guess. The cook just went out to the kitchen, I guess supper will be ready when we get back—"

"Your Bess is a marvelous cook. That was the best chicken—Myron, what's wrong? Did I say something—"

"Uh—no. Dad buys all our meat in town, I don't like having animals killed. It upsets me terribly."

Her eyes widened as she followed the apparently random train of thought. "You have empathy with animals too? Dr. Sams didn't mention that."

"He probably doesn't know. It didn't show up till a couple of years ago. It's a nuisance when they're being killed, even on the next farm, but most of the time it helps. I locate lost calves and pigs, and I can tell when the cows need to be bred or—" he broke off sharply, then with a quick look at her bland and unembarrassed features, continued, "—or when they're ready to calve. Things like that."

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"You'd probably make a good farmer."

He said scornfully, "Dad says so. Good Lord, if that's all I'm good for—"

"Don't be angry. You could do worse. But there'll be years to make up your mind. Go on. Tell me more. About the animals."

He shook his head, stretching out his legs preparatory to rising. "You're not interested now," he said. But he did not get up. She looked at him, in startled inquiry, a fraction of a second before he put his arm around her, quickly and inexpertly, and kissed her.

Her eyes were wide and surprised, but she did not draw away, and after a minute his arm dropped and he stood up, shaking his head slightly. "No good, you're being nice to me. At least you didn't slap my face."

"Why should I? I have random impulses too. Just don't make a habit of it."

His face burned and he said roughly, "Don't worry, for the luvva mike, that's one thing I couldn't do." "One thing—oh!" Now it was Doris Robson's turn to feel her face burning; she spoke aloud, fearing that in his emotional tumult Myron would be unable to read her thoughts clearly enough to find her full meaning.

"Your life is going to be complicated enough, heaven knows. You should have a chance—" she stopped. Myron wasn't listening. He shook his head, in the first real defeat he had ever consciously met.

"Come on. They'll be waiting supper for us."

Coffee had been cleared away when Myron stood up, with a crooked grin. "As per instructions, I will now get lost." He met their eyes with an impudent stare as he shrugged into his jacket. "Hash me over without my inhibiting presence—since unfortunately it wouldn't be enough to send me upstairs." He took his small triumph out of the room, but Doris relaxed a little when she heard the door slam.

"Listen to that. He's just a kid. He slammed the door. Anyone who was really as hard and mature as he was trying to sound, wouldn't have done that."

Dr. Fisher said dryly "The advantages of a psychological degree. He's never been spanked, you know."

"I don't believe it hurt him." Guy Cameron took out his pipe and filled it slowly.

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"He had to go without a lot of the things other boys take for granted. I figured he might as well miss out on the spankings, too."

It was Dr. Fisher who put the question in all of their minds. "I suppose he's really out of the way, Guy?"

Doris said rationally, "If he wants to listen in, he will. We can't stop him. So let's assume he's done what he said he would."

"He's probably gone for a walk on the ridge." Guy Cameron sounded apologetic. "Actually he has quite a developed sense of honor, although you might not think so."

Doris absent - mindedly picked up her coffee-cup, remembered it was empty and put it down again. "I don't quite understand his outburst today, though. Has he really an eidetic memory as he claims?"

"About everything else, yes."

"It's odd that a memory so perfect should have those blank spots," Dr. Fisher commented.

"Not so odd," Doris said slowly, "We all tend to repress unpleasant experiences. But for a telepath—I don't suppose it's possible, Professor Cameron, that you've really developed a mental shield against him?"

Guy Cameron surveyed them through the pale haze of pipe smoke. If his face had not been so worried, it might have seemed amused. "I wouldn't know, it's more in your field than mine. But I've never been able to hide anything else from him, and God knows I've tried."

"May I ask you a personal question? Do you resent Myron's—ability?"

"It's hard to say. Nobody likes living in a goldfish bowl." Cameron knocked his pipe against the edge of a plate. "That's not exactly relevant, anyhow. Today, I was thinking about the other times this had come up between us—and he couldn't read it. Or wouldn't."

"Couldn't," Dr. Fisher said, "and it frightened him."

"You know, he made one good point, Professor Cameron," Doris said thoughtfully, "What are you going to do when he is twenty-one?"

Cameron's head sagged in his hands. "Lord knows," he said, with bitter honesty, "I don't. I've even thought, heaven forgive me, of having him committed to a mental institution—no, don't look like that, Miss Robson, I'd never be able to do it, and if I did,

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they wouldn't keep him overnight before they found out he's saner than I am. All I can do is protect him while I'm morally and legally able to do it. Then sit back and hope to God he makes out all right."

Doris could not speak for a minute. Then she said gently, "That's all any parent can do. But I think the time is past for too much protection. He's outgrown it. I'm going to turn over my report to the Dean, and see if he will accept Myron at St. Martins. Maybe we're not equipped for handling telepath students, but somebody's got to try."

Cameron looked up, and Doris was dismayed to see his face haggard with real fear. She added, still in her gentlest voice, "It's natural for a father to be anxious, and you've had more cause for anxiety than most. But believe me, it's best."

Dr. Fisher said harshly, "You don't know what you're talking about!"

"And I can't allow it." Guy Cameron shook his head firmly. "Miss Robson, you mean well and it was kind of you to come here, but the law permits me to protect Myron at least until he comes of age. I gave up my work, I bought the farm, as soon as it became apparent what he was. I'll have to keep trying. Perhaps by that time, I can convince him that his only safety lies in isolation, until—or unless—he outgrows his sensitivity."

Doris was growing angry. As always, the color rose in her face, though her voice was as crisp and professional as ever. "I'm not sure whether your real anxiety is for Myron or yourself. Believe me, Myron's no superman. But if he's no conquering hero, he's no child either. He'll be a man soon. He needs to be with other young people — with girls—"

Cameron looked at her, a new fear in his eyes as he whispered, "No, he wouldn't . . . Did he—make a pass at you?"

In a surge of real rage, Doris snapped, "He did not. You're acting as if he were a moron who had to be put away at puberty for fear he'd molest some girl! Instead of being—perhaps the most knowing person in the world. Too knowing! Can't you see, he won't have any youth or any naturalness left, any way to acquire experience, any—" she spread her hands helplessly and finished, "—any humanity at all!" The men saw that her eyes glistened, and that there were drops on her eye-

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lashes. "No, he didn't make a pass at me, as you put it. But I'd have felt easier about him if he had!" She pushed back her chair, so violently that it fell to the floor, and walked out of the room without looking back.

Myron did not look at any of them over the breakfast table. He ate unerringly by touch, his eyes blank and his mind perceptibly elsewhere, wanting to impress it on them that they were not in his thoughts at all. He wondered if he was overdoing it when he rose to pour Doris a cup of coffee for which she had not asked, and her very tart "Thank you," brought his ears back into focus, ringing in embarrassment.

"You're leaving us this morning?"

"I have to be back for a noon appointment."

"Just write me off, Miss Robson. One more student interviewed who is not college material." He kept his voice flippant, enjoying her queer little sag of defeat as she said, "I'll recommend you be enrolled in the extension division." ((There's no sense in trying to get him into St. Martins if his father won't allow him to attend. A normal boy would run away—no, I mustn't even think that.)) "We'll make arrangements for an extension tutor, without charge, of course." ((If I have to, I'll drive up myself every week, just only for old Sammy's sake. If we could only have him on the campus. The Psychologly department—))

Myron enjoyed this rather morbidly; even the knowledge of his uniqueness was no comfort. Later he carried her bag down from the guest room, lingering in the room for a moment and experimenting with the indefinable trace of her presence; wondering if it were rudimentary time-traveling or some purely physical, subliminal trace of her—perfume, some slight scent. He wished he could ask someone. He stowed the suitcase in the car while she thanked his father for a pleasant weekend.

"Goodbye, Myron. I'll see you again." ((Why did they warn me not to shake hands?))

"I explained about the electric shock from people I don't know," he said, and defiantly put out his hand, wondering if she would withdraw her own. She did not; her fingers felt warm and firm.

"Say hello to Sammy for me. Tell him his prize exhibit is still in the cage."

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"He'll be glad you remember him." ((He's being cocky because he's hurt. I've got to do something for him, somehow.)) "If you should come to Martinsville, Myron, remember, I'll always be glad to see you."

He felt the phrase was one of the social falsenesses he hated -- she knew he never left the farm? Angry by her attempt to smooth him over, he probed her thoughts for something with which he could startle her, but found only one of those confusing blurred patches. Catching at self-possession, he said hardily, "Glad to. Give me your address, will you?"

"Of course." She opened her handbag and, with a little silver pencil, wrote her home address on one of her business cards. "I mean it, Myron. I will see you again, soon."

He let his eyes lapse into nonseeing as she walked with his father to the car. But he followed her with his thoughts down the unknown road, straining his perceptions to their uttermost limit, before he shivered back into focus again, thrust the card into his pocket and became aware of his father's eyes. He said impatiently "Nothing, I'm all right, Dad. Your worrying gets on my nerves. You go in and have another cup of coffee, and I'll go and help Bud turn out the cows."

It was ten days before the long-distance call came from Martinsville, and Guy Cameron was away on a business trip. Myron, keyed up to hear Doris' voice, was sharply disappointed when a male voice inquired:

"Is this Myron Cameron? This is Dean Mathews, at St. Martins college."

Myron recovered from his shock and identified himself, and the strange voice continued, "We have your application, Cameron, and since you are not a high school graduate, but privately educated, you'd have to pass our regular entrance examinations. Miss Robson has explained your—" the Dean hesitated, "—particular problem. I wonder if you could come up to Martinsville for a personal interview? Perhaps we could smooth out a few of the problems that way."

The telephone froze in Myron's fingers. Evidently Doris had defied his father's ultimatum. He wondered what she had actually told the Dean. He had to speak past a most irrational thickening in his throat. "Why—why, yes, sir. When do you want to see me?"

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"Martinsville isn't far from your town. Do you suppose you could come up tomorrow? I have a free hour in the afternoon—say, at three—and I'm sure we can arrange these little problems. Among other things—" the voice sounded friendly, "we have to protect both you and the college from —shall we say, your unfortunate publicity in academic circles?"

"Believe me, sir," said Myron, with heartfelt emphasis, "it *is* unfortunate!"

When he had replaced the receiver, he stood for a moment looking around the room. He was sure that if his father had been present the conversation would have run differently. Myron might have argued with his father, reasoned, even begged. Now he simply decided.

He looked up the train to Martinsville, and confirmed it with the first independent telephone call he had ever placed. Point by point, he made his plans and rehearsed them during half the night, lying awake. There was nothing, he told himself, either startling or unusual in what he was doing; only his un-natural isolation made it seem even mildly adventurous.

The next morning he ventured into his father's room to borrow a small suitcase—Myron, who never left the farm, of course had none of his own. He packed it with one or two overnight essentials—only one train a day ran to Martinsville, and he would have to stay there overnight. Halfway through an attempt to fold a shirt into manageable proportions, he heard the housekeeper coming up the stairs to make his bed, and froze. Bess would hardly stop him, but he wanted to avoid questioning; wanted to avoid any discussion at all about what he was doing. He ran his perception around the farm, briefly touching dogs, cows and hens, discovering that Bud was in the barn and would soon be coming for Myron to help with the mid-morning work—*As if I were going to be an ordinary farmer!* Guy Cameron and Dr. Sams had always taken it for granted that this would be Myron's wisest choice; the safe isolation of the farm, the physical demand of the work providing a counterbalance to a life which threatened to become over-cerebral.

Deliberately, searching for the right "feeling"—he had done this only rarely—he directed a thought, first at the woman on the stairs, then at

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the man coming up from the barn. *Stay away* he formed the thought as clearly as he dared, *don't bother Myron today.*

It was a little like tuning a radio to the proper frequency—at least, thinking of it that way helped him to visualize the process. He heard Bess turn and go off down the stairs, catching the tail of her thought, *Ah, I'll not bother the boy, sulking in his room he is because his Dad . . .* Now he directed his attention, delicately and precisely, at the man. *Stay away . . . Stay away . . .* if he formed the thought *too* clearly, their minds — *inferior minds,* he thought scornfully, accustomed to receiving signals through the ear, would confuse the sensory impressions and come looking for him, believing he had called them.

He saw from his window—although he did not need to look—that the stocky gray-haired man in army-surplus khakis had paused, indecisively; then Bud scowled, looked around, shrugged and returned to the barn. Myron permitted himself a tiny triumphant grin.

He reached the door unquestioned; the drive; the gate. He stepped through with a queer disquiet, which he banished by telling himself that the mental habits of years could not be easily broken. He walked to the hilltop and looked down the road, baked white in the September sun, which led into the small town of Sylvan. Two or three houses, spaced perhaps half a mile apart; a curve in the road, then the clustered buildings—nearly a hundred, he thought in amazement. He had lived within a thousand yards of this hilltop all his life; never before had he looked down at the village. When he and his father went for their rare drives, they took the opposite direction, back into the mountains.

And yet the scene was not unfamiliar — of course, he thought, battling with elusive disquiet, I came over this road when we came to the farm. I was three then. He took a deep breath and started down the hill.

It was something of an effort to keep eyes and ears fastened on his surroundings. His consciousness, aware of new objects within his range, kept trying to extend itself; touch each new tree and fence-post, each unfamiliar animal in the pastures or along the hedges. He came within a few hundred feet of the first farm-

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house, probed briefly without meaning to, recoiled at the unfamiliar shock of touching a stranger and—as he had done with Doris — withdrew his "aura." The attempt made him think again of Doris. When would he see her? Perhaps—but he cut off the thought, realizing it was leading him away from the necessity to keep his mind on what he was doing.

Far back in his mind he wondered if that were the real reason for his isolation; their feeling that he could not discipline his abnormally extended consciousness enough to deal with the immediate problems of everyday. He passed another house, and his sensory awareness lapsed. He swerved slightly to avoid a stone in the road, not seeing it; turned his steps somewhat further to the edge of the highway as a car passed, but neither heard or saw it. He passed the third of the isolated houses. Another passing automobile pulled to a stop, and the driver hailed him:

"Want a ride?"

This was not part of the carefully-rehearsed plan, and the shock of the driver's attention—*Must be a strange kid, haven't seen him before*—was so startling that he recoiled, with an automatic—*No, No, let me alone!* even while he said aloud quietly and courteously "No, thank you, I'm only going a little way." But the driver had felt only the lashing resentment, which he had interpreted as words. He said heatedly "Now look, you young squirt—" and the motor roared as he slammed the door and gunned the car away. Myron watched, baffled, a shadow of trouble dawning in his eyes.

The houses were closer now, and it was hard to keep his scattered impressions clear; his mind kept darting off to follow a child racing after a flying ball, a housewife pushing a baby-carriage, whose almost mindless mental stream held him blankly aghast for a moment before he jerked himself back. He walked down the main street, deflecting the tiny random shocks of scattered weekday shoppers. A little nag of trouble caught at him as he passed the school—what was it?

—No! The school was a block away from the main road—but how did he know? He'd never been — or had he? Automatically, without thought, he had turned off the main highway toward the school; now he reversed himself, ignoring the stare of a

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woman on the street, and walked back, scowling.

He stopped at the single traffic light in the center of town, letting it change from green to red to green again while he oriented himself. There was a bank, a drugstore, two small grocery stores, a filling station, the post office. A woman passed, elaborately walking round him ((My land, the way these boys block traffic!)) but Myron did not move, studying out his next plan. The small red-brick railroad station was at the end of the street, and it would be half an hour before his train left. He crossed the street, pushed the heavy glass door of the bank and went inside.

The clear and echoing silence, the scentless and spacious cold of the interior, flicked him with a curious sensory impact and it was a second or two before he summoned awareness and went to one of the windows.

He had had a checking account since he was ten. Guy Cameron, aware that isolation might easily make Myron overdependent, had given him as much responsibility as possible, and since his early teens Myron had bought his own clothing, books and radio parts by mail order. He filled out a check for thirty dollars in cash and took it to the teller.

The sharp electric shock of his approach stung his whole body with such impact that he physically tightened, his tense scalp muscles pulling his head into an ache; the teller looked up from the face of the check with surprise and curiosity.

"Are you Myron Cameron? We haven't seen you in here before."

Myron frowned through the ache in his eyes. "Is there anything wrong with the check?"

"No, of course not. Will you endorse it on the back, please?" He watched as Myron signed his name, and the intrusive texture of his thoughts was a prying pain:

((That kid of Cameron's. He looks okay — I always heard he was queer in the head. Ought to ask him for identification, maybe—no, he wears it on his face, looks just like the old man. Ought to check by phone, maybe, but I guess if Cameron didn't want him to draw cash he wouldn't keep an account this size open for him.))

Myron pushed the countersigned check through the iron grille. It was taking all his control—whatever he did, he must not lash out at the teller

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as he had done at the driver of the passing car. The teller handed him some bills, looking at his suitcase.

"Off on a trip, son?"

"Martinsville." Myron felt the money with unpracticed fingers; he had balanced his checking account unaided for five years but had never before touched a penny of cash. "College."

"I've got a boy at St. Martins, up there," the clerk confided. ((He can't be defective if he's off to college. Guess it's just talk because he didn't go to school here in town.))— "Did I make a mistake in the amount?"

Myron realized that he was still absent-mindedly fingering the crisp bills. He flushed and thrust them into his pocket. "Oh, no, no, not at all," he said quickly, and walked out.

He halted on the sidewalk, his hand still touching the bills in his pocket; there was nothing else in the pocket except the small card with Doris' address. He thought about the teller's son who was in St. Martins college, and who probably took it all very much for granted—and probably, Myron thought resentfully, without half my intelligence!

It's not as if I were going to get into trouble. I think old Sams sold them on the notion that I was some weird superman who'd disrupt the world if he was let loose. Well, maybe I could—if I wanted to—but I don't specially want the world. Just a normal-size hunk of it, not a crow's-nest observatory! He chuckled a little, though, at the notion of homo superior, or homo-sapiens-plus-one, solemnly going out like a conquering hero to take over the world with one little suitcase.

He reached the railroad station without event, and purchased a ticket. The local train which ran through Sylvan once a day was half empty when Myron climbed aboard, and he found himself completely alone in an unoccupied chair car. The train began to move slowly; Myron, watching through the window, let his consciousness disperse once again until he picked up the electrical impact of another personality, approaching him briskly. He started to draw away with a shudder of revulsion, then recalled himself; it was only the conductor.

The conductor was an elderly man, plumply perspiring in his heavy serge uniform, his pleasant face puzzled.

"Have I seen you before, young fellow?"

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"I don't think so." Myron, handing over his ticket to be punched, tried to draw in his perceptors against the low-keyed annoyance of the man's presence. He probed briefly, gave up the effort, "Maybe you know my father," he said, making an effort to match the man's politeness, "I'm supposed to look like him. Guy Cameron?"

The fat face creased in a smile. "Sure, I know Professor Cameron." He stuck out a ruddy hand and Myron gripped it, unwillingly, enduring the small painful shock of contact. "Your Dad rides up to town every few weeks. Thought I'd seen you before, though. You going away to school, college or something?"

Myron nodded, and the conductor patted him on the shoulder. Myron, by great effort, kept himself from flinching. "Good luck, then." He went on to the next car, and Myron let out a held breath, relaxing. The train was slowing for a stop at another village, and Myron determined to experiment; deliberately, carefully, he projected a mental command;

Stay—away! Don't come in here, there are other cars on this train—stay away!

He wondered if it were success or coincidence when the train started again without a single passenger entering the car where he sat in isolation. Twice more the train stopped to take on passengers at small towns; twice more Myron projected his mental broadcast and the car remained empty. Once a couple with a young child paused at the entrance, then the woman said aloud, "There are plenty of other cars, why sit in an empty one?"

Myron watched the changing scenery calmly, not thinking. Gradually the houses thickened, large buildings loomed on the horizon; Myron, who had never seen a factory or warehouse, recognized them from pictures and knew they were entering the city. He watched the ribboning rails flicker by as they plowed through streets, felt the vague shock on his nerves.

"Martins-ville," singsonged the conductor, and laughed. "You in here all by yourself? Trains's crowded in every other car. People sure are crazy—crowd up in four cars and leave the fifth plumb empty!"

"It's not empty," Myron pointed out reasonably, "I'm here."

The conductor's paunch shook with laughter. "Right, you are. Not carrying stink-

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bombs, are you?" he inquired good-naturedly, and picked up Myron's ticket, going on into the next car.

Myron descended the station stairs into hell.

The impact struck him from all directions, slashing at his nerves; he drew in as far as he could, walking blindly through the crowded station, threading between benches loaded with babbling people—people, *people!* He tried to blank out the onslaught, drawing back to the wall, literally physically unable to face the crowd at the street-door. The sound and sight were bad enough to his isolated personality, but the physical impact was agony, and in that blinded agony he struck out—

Manipulate — manipulate! You did it on the train, no one can come near you if you don't want them — he clutched vanishing self-control, and dropped on a bench, squeezing his eyes shut, head bent—

Stay away! Get — away — from me —!

Eyes closed, he was conscious only of the lessening of that unbearable tension, but his heart pounded, his throat beat dry with panic. He actually started upright, in sudden awareness that no one was near him; at the far door, the tail of a pushing, jostling crowd was pressing wildly toward the street. He stared in dread, wondering—*What's happened, why are they all running—*

Tardy consciousness dawned; he had commanded, *get away,* and in doing so, he had picked up the reverse flow of their fear and flight. He grabbed hard at his suitcase. *Dr. Sams said — then I* am *something to be afraid of!* But the thought was not without its own satisfaction. He had satisfactorily faced his first obstacle, and though he was sweating with shock, a shred of conceit was building in him, too.

Two uniformed policemen pushed the door and stared around the almost-empty station. One shouted, "What's wrong in here?"

Myron gave a guilty start. There was a woman behind the Information desk, a solitary news-agent at the magazine stand, a guard on duty by the gate marked THIS WAY TO TRAINS. None of them answered. The officer looked round in bewilderment, then addressed himself to the woman at the Information desk;

"Miss, why did all those people run out of here at once?"

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Although the conversation was out of range of normal hearing, Myron heard her puzzled answer. "I didn't see anything wrong. I saw them all running out, but I thought it was something outside in the street. I wanted to get out but I have to stay on duty here." She was thinking, ((I was crazy scared, but I won't tell him that!))

The policeman walked about aimlessly. "No sign of fire, or anything," he muttered. Myron looked up, steeling himself for the queer shock of impact—

"Mister, did you see anything happen?"

Myron made his eyes wide and blank and questioning. "No sir. I was just sitting here on this bench."

"You didn't see anything? Hear anything?"

"Nothing at all."

The policeman looked at him rather curiously, but there was nothing he could do, finally, except shrug and turn away. Myron picked up his suitcase and stood up. Evidently his manipulation of crowds was a two-edged weapon; it kept people away from him, but it also made him vulnerable—and attracted attention when he did not move with them.

He took the card with Doris' address from his pocket. Perhaps he should telephone her? Then, thoughtfully, he put it back. He wanted to complete his mission, interview the Dean, perhaps see Dr. Sams, and turn up in triumph—not like a runaway needing help!

He felt weary and depleted. He looked at his watch, deciding to go into a restaurant and have something to eat. He flinched slightly at the thought of facing another crowded room . . . nevertheless he was young enough to be mildly excited . . . *why did a curious memory — memory? — touch him then, of a room filled with chattering children, of—*

It was gone. The palms of his hands had broken into a light sweat, and he took his handkerchief from a pocket and unobtrusively wiped them. The instant of memory, or vision, had vanished in shock; a man passed him, a woman bumped him lightly, two women walking—*Stay away—no, I can't do that, not here in the street*—but his head was ringing. He found his way down the street by instinct, avoiding contact with the pedestrians but neither seeing or hearing. He twisted a corner to a less crowded street, plunging along it with fumbling steps, then drew a

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deep breath, forcing his eyes to focus—

That was enough of this running away! He had to get something to eat, climb on a bus like an ordinary human, go up to the college—

A sign across the street said CAFETERIA and he crossed, his mind flicking to contact with a careening taxi-driver and he narrowly missed being sideswiped ((Look at that fool kid trying to get run over—!)) he shut off the thought with a physical effort that made his stomach heave, and stepped into the cafeteria; walked to the counter and surveyed the foods spread out there.

"What you want, young man?"

Myron found his voice and ordered. His eyes were watering slightly, and his hands sweating; he was no longer hungry, but weighing the alternate risk of attracting more attention, he carried the food to a fairly isolated table and sat down.

He had eaten only a few bites when the doors swung open and a stream of men and women flowed into the cafeteria. A local office-building—Myron picked this up in scraps from the shattering impact of thought—had dislodged for the lunch hour.

It was unbearable. The sheer physical shock made Myron wonder if he would be sick where he sat or if he could somehow manage to get to his feet and get outside. He dropped his fork on the floor; it didn't matter. He let it lie there, making no effort to retrieve it.

He couldn't cause another riot. He couldn't—he bent over his plate, helplessly. *I can't stand it—I've got to get away.*

Four women at the next table rose simultaneously and left without finishing their lunches. A cruising bus boy started after them; noticed Myron's fallen fork and brought him another from a stack of clean silver on a corner trolley. Myron muttered ungracious thanks.

A man bearing a laden tray threaded his way through the tables, glanced speculatively at the uncleared table next to Myron, then put down his tray on the other end of Myron's table. It was painful; Myron could not control the sudden, furious, wordless backlash of shock. He looked up, hoping frantically the man had not sensed it, intending to apologize and leave the table, but the man had gone, leaving his tray. He came back in less than a minute, another man behind him, stocky, in white

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jacket and paper cap with the name of the restaurant printed across the front. The latter set his hands on his hips and glowered at Myron.

"What's the matter with you?"

Myron said painfully "N-nothing."

"Mr. Allan here says you swore at him. This here is a cafeteria. You don't want anybody else at your table, you go eat at the Ritz."

Myron protested through dry lips, "I didn't say a word to him, Mister. Ask the boy there. Ask the men at that table—" he half turned. The men were gone, their uneaten lunch congealing on the thick plates. The manager surveyed him suspiciously, and Mr. Allan muttered "young punk!" rousing an uncomfortable memory of the man who had offered him a ride on the highway.

The manager said with sudden decision, "You better get out. I didn't hear you say nothing, but you been upsetting the customers some way. You get out—and don't come back." Myron reached for the punched ticket, and the manager took it from his fingers. "Forget it. Just scram out of here."

Myron plunged blindly toward the door. The manager's icy voice followed him; "Don't forget your suitcase."

He grabbed it, not seeing, and stumbled into the horror of the street again. Men, women and children, a thousand pinpricks of contact stabbing at him like electric needles, assaulting his senses—he fled like a hunted thing, adrift on a tide of panic. Somewhere he dropped the suitcase and forgot it. *Stay away—get away from me*—but he felt the thought scatter and thin out, ineffective, lost in the vast indifference of the city crowd. He reeled, fled, plunged down another street, ran full against a lamp-post and hung there dazed and half-senseless under the scornful scrutiny of a policeman. He probed for contact and even that failed in the completeness of his exhaustion. He had no strength left even for a mental protest as the rough hand of the policeman violated his barriers, jerking him up and spinning him around.

"Here, what's the matter, you drunk?" Then, not ungently, "My God, it's just a school kid. What's the matter, kid? You hurt? Sick?"

Myron had no voice left to answer. He only gasped. The policeman regarded him curi-

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ously for a minute, then whistled a cruising taxi. "Where do you live?"

Myron cleared his head momentarily for the question, lost it again in fuzz, the policeman unclasped his hand and took the white card from his fingers.

"Dr. Robson. You look like you could use a doctor at that. Got money for the cab?" Myron managed blindly to nod. He was not seeing now. He wheezed with agonizing claustrophobia as the door slammed him inside with the shock of the driver, the pain rolling over him—

Doris. It was the only thought in his mind. A mist fogged his thoughts, clearing momentarily in a series of confused pictures; a crowded room of small children, a larger room where boys of thirteen sat at one-armed desks, an unfamiliar stretch of highway, the face of a white-clad woman, the railroad station, no—another station—the fog rolled back. After a confused interlude out of which he fished only a random impression of climbing unfamiliar steps, there was a doorway and then, swimming out of mist, the face of Doris framed in gilt, gray eyes slowly widening in dismay and distress.

She said, "Myron!"

Then she moved quickly as the boy pitched forward.

The boy lay by the window in the square back room of the old farmhouse, lazily exploring the familiar touch of the yellow-brown pasture, the animals scattered up and down the slope. Absently, as a preoccupied man pats the dog beside his chair, he touched the consciousness of the black-and-white heifer, then started up in surprise at the—strange?—impact of the opening door;

"Holy Moses! Sammy, what are you doing here? Gosh, it's good to see you, sir," he exclaimed, then, abashed, pulled up the quilt around his pajama top when he saw who was behind his old friend.

"Oh—hullo, Miss Robson, I didn't expect to see you again so quick!"

Gilbert Sams, Professor of Psychology, came to the bedside and shook Myron's hand. He was a thick-set, bespectacled man with bushy tight-curled hair and a florid face that creased into crinkles when he grinned. "You been giving trouble again, Superman?"

"Oh, cut it out!" Myron gibed, "aren't you ever going to get tired of that worn-out

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old joke? Look out, or I'll tell Dad all your girl-friends' names. No, I guess I had that what-you-call-it, Asiatic flu or something. You didn't have to come way up here for that. Afraid your prize monkey's going to get out of the cage?"

Dr. Sams chuckled but there was an overtone of seriousness in his voice. "That's just what I'm afraid of, maybe—do you remember Dr. Robson?"

"What kind of joke is this?" Myron demanded irritably, "Why shouldn't I remember her? She spent a weekend here. Did you have any luck with the Dean of the College? I guess maybe I've missed Registration, haven't I? Why—what's the matter, Doris? Did I say something—"

Dr. Sams turned to her and said sharply, "Go downstairs and talk to Guy. I want to ask Myron a few questions."

The boy laughed with resignation. "Same old Sammy." There was something curiously childish through the broken timbre of his voice. "Someday you're going to take me apart to see what makes me tick, aren't you?"

"I wish to God I could," Doris heard Gilbert Sams say, as she closed the door. At the foot of the stairs, Guy Cameron said fiercely, "This time —this time we're going to have to *tell* him! I can't go through this again and again!"

Doris' eyes widened. "This has happened *before?* Dr. Sams didn't tell me—I thought it was only the shock—"

Gilbert Sams' heavy tread vibrated the stairs as he came downstairs. "Why disturb him? He'll never believe you, and if you try to prove it, you'll drive him completely out of his mind. I tried to tell him he'd run away again. He *did not* understand me. We've got a total selective amnesia there." He added after a minute, quietly, "Make up your mind to it, Guy. You'll have to go through this every six months or so."

"If I thought so, I wouldn't worry," said Guy Cameron in a curiously flat voice. He looked at the staircase and the closed door of Myron's room. "He gets further every time. Some day he'll learn to protect himself. And then what will happen to him?"

"Or," said Dr. Sams ominously, "to the world."

THE END

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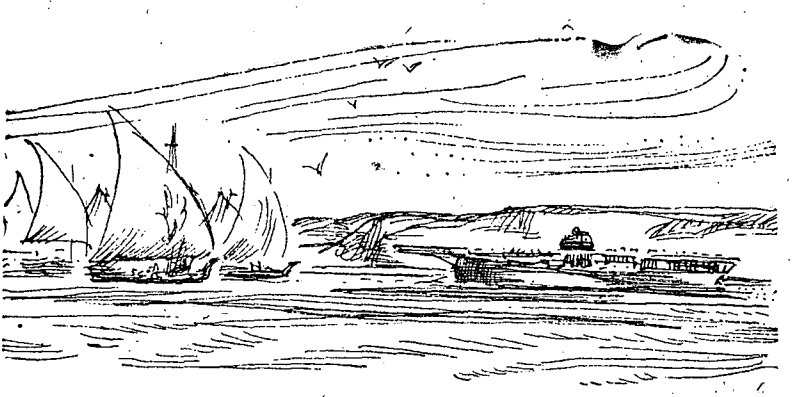
By JACK SHARKEY



If you can't understand the title of this story, don't worry.... We're not sure we understand the story.

I DON'T know whose idea the camouflage was. Probably some desk-pounder back in D. C. who was hipped on MacBeth and the sneaky way MacDuff's cohorts approached Dunsinane, but whatever the instigation, the *Appomattox*, a carrier with a crew of nearly three thousand hands,

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was floating at anchor just off the coast of Greece painted a bilious pied-pattern of yellows, greens and browns, and even trailing rock-hued canvas from the edge of her flight deck to the surface of the glassy blue sea. We were supposed to look like an island. Personally, we looked like *nothing* more than a cluttered-up carrier, and, as I pointed out to some of my fellow crewmen, our *biggest* danger was from the air, from which point our silhouette gave us away like a neon sign saying "Bombs away!"

I'm not much in rank—Theophilus Rogers, Seaman 2nd Class (though my buddies call me "Jolly" for reasons which if I have to explain them to you, you wouldn't understand anyhow)—but, even though anyone less than an officer—which is the nearest thing to canonization while one is still alive—is not supposed to do any thinking, I found myself using my brain fast and furious when the radar shack started smoking.

"Fire!" I thought. My mind galloped through a small fantasy involving lowering the boats, dodging the shrapnel when the bombs in the hold started blamming, or possibly just diving in and taking my chances on swimming to shore. But that's when everything went off the horizontal, and I found that my main concern was just keeping my balance, which I did by clasping the starboard rail until I expected the metal to ooze up between my fingers like toothpaste. It was the damnedest feeling. I couldn't believe what was happening.

See, *we* didn't tilt, not really. I mean, the horizon was still paralleling the deck, and none of the stacked ammo in the gun placements rolled down the deck, nor did we commence sliding stern-first down the sheet of water on which we floated, even though it seemed to be suddenly on the vertical. The nearest I've ever come to it is when I'm at a movie and the picture on the screen, because the camera has tilted ninety degrees to the side, suddenly tips till it is sideways, and I have to tip my head in the same direction to see everything in its proper relationship to me. When I've done this, of course, the picture is once again related to the position of my head, and "up" seems to be in the same direction my forehead is from my eyes, only my semicircular canals are telling me that

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"up" is in the direction of my topside ear.

Well, that's the feeling I got. That we *all* got. We just *knew*, that's all, that "up" was toward the bow, even if all nature seemed to be in its proper place. The sensation must have lasted maybe five minutes or so, then everything felt as though it was settling back into place again, and the lateral-type vertigo went away.

I was about to dismiss it as an end-product of taking too much chipped beef on toast at the noon meal and get back to my worries about the fire at sea, but at this moment I saw the captain approaching me. Ordinarily, his official position is enough to wipe the slate clean in my mind till I see what he wants, but this time his *physical* position had a lot to do with it. He was on his hands and knees, creeping along the deck toward me like a badly-trained commando.

"Sir?" I said, helpfully.

"Rogers . . ." he said, in a husky, weak voice, "what's happened? Why don't we fall?"

He always called me Rogers, not Seaman or Sailor, at least since we hit the Mediterranean and he found out I spoke a fair amount of classical Greek. He seemed to find me invaluable in dealing with the pro-Democratic guerillas ashore whenever we found it necessary to land a boat to get back pilots who ran out of fuel before they made rendezvous with the ship and had had to bail out into the Grecian hills.

"I don't know, sir," I said in all honesty. "I thought it was noon chow acting up."

"Maybe—" his face was a queasy gray as he struggled to his feet, using the rail for support, "maybe that's all it was, hey?"

"Probably, sir," I said, in a convincing tone that didn't match my inner convictions.

"Sail ho!" cried the lookout, all at once.

"Sail ho?" echoed the captain, in exasperation. Captain Blicks was a sworn foe of Conrad and Melville, asserting that their romantic notions of life on the bounding main had ruined many a man for the realistic, strictly-business approach necessary for existence in the modern-day navy. "What's with this 'Sail ho!' talk?"

Before he could rout out the lookout and start some sort of court martial proceedings, I gently—and a little insubordinately—took him by

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the arm and pointed off toward the horizon, where, indeed, a sail was to be seen. And even as I made my gesture, another and another appeared there, until the entire horizon was a strip of serrated canvas.

Captain Blicks turned to me, wide-eyed. "A fishing fleet?" he said, in some bewilderment.

"If you'll excuse me, sir—" I said, and bridged my fingers over my eyes, scanning the approaching fleet in the shade afforded by my hands. "It— It seems to be, sir." I replied, slowly. "I think I see the sunlight gleaming on their catch. The boats must be crammed *full* of fish!"

Then I looked again, and my hands dropped to my sides, my jaw following suit as far as my trachea would let it.

"What is it, man? Speak up!" said Captain Blicks.

"It's not *fish* I saw gleaming sir," I said, my tongue almost refusing to work. "It's *armor!* The men on those boats are helmeted and breastplated in *armor!*"

"Yipe!" said Captain Blicks, adding in the next instant, "Battle stations! Everyone to battle stations!"

The deck was awash in seconds with dungareed men, all dashing to their posts. My own station was in the radio shack, the same locale wherein the fire— I'd almost forgotten the fire by this time— had broken out, but I still didn't move. "Sir," I pointed out delicately, "they don't seem to be armed for modern warfare. Hadn't we better hold our fire until we see what they want?"

"Impossible," said Captain Blicks. "If they get much nearer, we won't be able to use the 16-inchers on them without endangering ourselves."

"Wait, sir," I said, not quite knowing what prompted this or my previous insubordination. "Let me take a boat out to meet them. There's something— Well, I don't think we'd better open fire until I talk to them."

"You think they're Greek?" asked Captain Blicks.

"I'm almost *afraid* they are, sir," I answered, pushing an erupting premonition back into my subconscious mind. "Let me talk to them, sir, please."

Ordinarily, I'd have been in the brig about three exchanges back in this dialogue, but there was something about the day that precluded ordinary behavior. The cap-

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tain, after passing a hand shakily over his eyes, straightened up and gave his consent. I requisitioned Tom Blaney and Jake Garth as my oarsmen—I owed them money, so they couldn't say no—and we lowered a boat, and headed for the lead ship of the fast-nearing fleet.

I took a rifle and some extra clips along, just in case.

"Hail, friend!" I greeked toward the first boat, from a distance of about a hundred yards, trying to ignore the shoulder-to-shoulder cluster of bowmen, arrows nocked, along the prow rails of the wooden craft.

"What manner of men are you?" called out a tall, dark-tanned man, removing his helmet and tossing curly brown hair, short-clipped, in the hot yellow sunlight.

"Men of peace," I replied carefully, "fearing lest we have angered some great power which has now come across the endless seas to destroy us."

"Be thou of Ilium?" the man called back, unsheathing a gleaming short sword, as though to signal the archers to let fly with their arrows.

"We be the men of *Appomattox,* yon floating island, great king," I answered, gesturing back toward our ship, bobbing ever so slightly behind its canvas skirt.

The man shaded his eyes and gazed toward the ship.

"I have not heard tell of this island," he said, finally.

"We come from a far-off land," I shouted back. "Myself, and the other men of the *Appomattox,* are under an enchantment, doomed to ride the seas until peace comes upon the Earth."

"That is indeed a long enchantment," the man replied, something of pity creeping into his voice. "By what name are you known?"

"Theophilus" I called back. "And to whom do I have the honor of speaking, noble king?"

"No king am I," he said, a little wistfully, it seemed to me, "but a mere warrior, going forth to avenge our great and good King Menelaus of Sparta. I am called Achilles."

"That's what I was afraid of," I muttered in English.

"Whadeesay, huh, whadeesay?" Jake and Tom chorused behind me. I waved them quiet with a dog-petting motion of my hand, and called back in Greek. "Of your fame we have heard much, great Achilles, most fearless of warriors, most brave on the battlefield, most powerful of

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arms, most noble of purpose—" I went on in this vein for awhile, hoping that, if I knew my Iliad, Achilles, with the disposition of a spoilt child, would swallow it without gagging. After about a five-minute eulogy that made the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* sound like veiled threats, I got a little dry, and had to stop.

"I wish you swift release from your enchantment," he said politely.

"And I wish you good luck in your quest," I replied, raising my hand at arm's length, palm toward Achilles, in a gesture of farewell.

"Perhaps you would care to devote your time to aiding the men of Sparta in their quest for the beautiful Helen?" he said, amicably enough, but that short sword was still unsheathed, and the arrows hadn't un-nocked any.

"Fain would I, would we *all,* thou prince of men," I replied, "but you know these damned enchantments. We can't go too far from our island without incurring the wrath of Poseidon."

Achilles nodded in slow comprehension. He was 99 44/100% enchanted himself, after that quick dip in the Styx. "I understand," he called, with a merry wave, sheathing the sword while thirty arrows returned to their quivers. "That's the way the catapult cracks, I guess."

"Sorry, and all that," I said.

"What the Underworld?" he shrugged, replacing his helmet.

"Well?" asked Jake.

"Back to the ship," I sighed.

They started rowing, the oars creaking in the locks.

"What've we got ourselves into, anyhow?" asked Tom.

"The Trojan War, I'm afraid," I muttered.

Captain Blicks nodded resignedly when I told him.

"I was afraid of something like this," he said. "While you were out there, I broke radio silence and tried to rouse somebody, anybody. The set's working fine, but it just sits there and buzzes. However—" a bright note crept into his voice, "—Trumbull, the radar tech, thinks he can fix the set, with a little time. Maybe then we can duplicate conditions and get back."

"Maybe," I agreed. "I must say, sir, if you'll pardon my speaking out—"

"Sure, go ahead," he responded.

"—Well, I'm surprised, but quite pleased, that you're not

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having me shipped off to sick bay with a bandaid on my brain."

"You mean," said Captain Blicks, his gray-blue eyes blinking in his leathery, wrinkled face, "you were afraid I wouldn't believe you?"

"Something like that, sir, yes," I admitted.

"Hell, man," he said, "I can believe my own senses, can't I? Didn't I feel that tilt when the radar went blooey? Didn't I see all those obsolete boats bobbing there on the water? Didn't I try to rouse someone with the radio? Hell, where else *could* we be?"

"But sir," I said, wonderingly, "I didn't think you were a student of mythology. How would you recognize the boats for what they were?"

"Gad, son, I'm a student of *Naval History!*" he snapped, with fierce pride. "I'd know that Iliad Armada anywhere."

"Naval History goes back *that* far?" I gasped.

"Great Godfrey, man," he exclaimed, "why do you think it takes so damned *long* to make captain!"

There was a knock on the door of the captain's quarters.

"Come in," said Captain Blicks.

Jake, Tom, and Willy Trumbull, the radar tech, came in, their sea caps in their hands. They looked self-consciously at one another, then Jake spoke up.

"Sir," he said, "sir, we were wondering if—if you might—that is—"

"Oh, come on, come on, spit it out," said Blicks.

"If you'd delay fixing up the radar, sir!" he blurted, in a single quick breath.

Blicks, as startled as I, recovered his composure and when he spoke, his raspy bass was gentle, even fatherly.

"I can only assume you have some sound reason for this request, Seaman Garth?"

"Oh, it's not *me,* sir!" Jake protested, anxiously. "I mean, it *is* me, but not by myself, sir, it's all of us, the crew together, we kind of thought—" his voice faded.

"Hmmm," said Blicks, a dusky scowl overriding his craggy features, "this has the sound of incipient mutiny!"

"Oh, *no* sir!" Jake, Tom and Willy gasped, like a cued vocal trio. Nothing like that!" Jake went on, taking the ball again. "If you say no, sir, then it's okay with us, sir. We were just asking is all."

"I see," said Captain Blicks, peering at the three men from beneath grizzled brows, his eyes glinting. "Then perhaps

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you'll explain why you wish to delay our departure—assuming, of course, that we *can* get back to 1944."

"Well, sir," said Jake, a little more enthusiastically. "All us guys been talking about this here Trojan War, and the guys that know something about it were telling us all about this—er—this *Helen,* sir. *You* know, the most beautiful doll in the world?"

"Aha!" said Blicks, raising his eyebrows, but narrowing his eyes at the same time, in a kind of shrewd comprehension. "And all the men, who haven't been off ship for months—"

"Exactly, sir," said Jake, with great relief. "We'd just like a quick glom, sir. Maybe take a couple of pictures. Nothing *rough,* sir, or nothing. Just a peek, if we can."

Blicks looked at me, his head tilted to one side. "You know, Rogers, the men *have* something there! *I* wouldn't mind a quick 'glom' myself."

"And just think, sir," I said eagerly, "what a picture of Helen of Troy would be worth back in the 20th century! Or even a shot of the wooden horse!"

"Hmmm . . ." said Blicks, thoughtfully, beginning to pace the floor of his cabin, hands clasped behind his umbar region. "It's a ticklish thing, a ticklish thing."

"Helen, sir?" blurted Tom, who was immediately shushed by the rest of us. Blicks ignored his question, and paced some more.

"If only we weren't engaged in fighting a war. The longer we stay away, the more tantamount it is to desertion."

"True, sir," I said, adding slowly, "however— There is *one* small point of protocol . . ."

"Yes, yes?" said Blicks eagerly, halting and watching me.

"Well, sir," I swallowed with difficulty, "for all we know, Willy here can get us back to the same time we *left* 1944, so we wouldn't really have been gone at all by their time."

"And sir—" said Tom, with a rare flash of brilliance, "you don't really have to follow rules from a navy of which the whole country ain't even been discovered yet by Columbus, even, let alone got a government?"

It was labyrinthine, but telling. Captain Blicks' face cleared of all clouds. He radiated sunshine. "*Well,* then!" he said. *Well,* then!"

"Sir?" asked Jake.

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"Tell the engineer to get up a head of steam!" said Captain Blicks, regally. The three men saluted and raced from the room. "Rogers!" said the captain, crooking a finger at me.

I approached, servilely. "Yes, sir?"

He gestured to a 1944 map of the Mediterranean.

"Where the hell is Ilium from here?" he snapped.

We trailed the Spartan Armada from a discreet distance, not because we were afraid of a conflict—we could have sent them in splinters toward the powder blue sky while they were still out of sight behind the horizon—but because my personal knowledge of the location of ancient Ilium embraced a region that ran in a ragged parabola from the heel of the "boot" to the Suez Canal region, including Arabia, the Jordan, and probably, if Blicks hadn't finally halted my wavering finger, Cape Horn, too.

So we trailed the fleet toward Ilium, only deviating from a bee-line course to give wide berth to an island that the Spartan Navy seemed anxious to avoid. If it hadn't been for our height above the water, easily ten times the height of any of the wooden craft, we'd never even have seen the island. Prudent use of binoculars elicited the fact that the island was tenanted by a rather voluptuous gaggle of females, who seemed to be doing nothing but a bad emulation of a can-can, accompanied by their own voices, or so I had to assume, noting the overworked lips and larynxes of this foam-flecked Follies.

"Sirens, sir," I said, turning the binoculars over to Captain Blicks. "Luring on the beach."

"I don't suppose we dare swing closer?" he asked, after a moment.

"Well, sir," I said, "it'll involve issuing about three thousand pairs of wax earplugs and lashing you to the mast."

"Oh, well," he shrugged. "Maybe some other time."

Only one near-battle incident marred our otherwise-peaceful trip. We drew too near the tail of the armada once, and one of the ships swung back to have at us, I guess, and we fired what was intended to be a warning shot, but succeeded in raising a geyser off their oncoming bow that lifted the hapless craft its own height out of the sea and dropped it back mast-first. We surged at full speed

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ahead to pick up survivors—though I had my doubts: that armor looked pretty cumbersome for a swimmer, even a good one—and came upon a swaying figure, middle-aged and balding, his occiput turning pink in the harsh sunlight, who was draped ungraciously across a broken spar, and cursing in beautiful word-images.

Ancient Greek or not, he recognized the function of the life-preserver when we threw it, and clung to it gamely while we hauled him dripping from the swells of the blue sea.

I stood beside Captain Blicks as our captive was led forward, mumbling in his beard and trying to wring the water from his tunic.

"Who are you?" I asked, in Greek.

"Name's Homer," he said, eyeing me suspiciously. "You got the wrong man, son. I'm not a warrior, just a war correspondent."

"Homer the Poet?" I gaped.

"Oh, you've heard of me?" he said, expansively, ceasing his garment-wringing. "Yes, that's who I am."

"But-but," I protested, "I thought you were blind!"

"Blind?" he said, scowling, "where'd you get a crazy idea like that?"

I almost told him, but then re-phrased my answer to: "One has heard reference made to 'Blind Homer', sitting 'midst the dinner guests telling his tales of love and war . . ."

"Oh, *that!*" he chuckled. "Hey, that's a good one, son. I take it you've never been to a Greek Orgy."

"Not— Not recently," I admitted.

"I could tell," he said, closing one eye wisely. "Son, at one o' them orgies, *everybody's* blind by the time dinner's over!"

I relayed all of this to Captain Blicks, who had been standing impatiently at my side. He shrugged and suggested we wait until Homer had a dry set of dungarees on him before continuing further diplomatic questioning.

"In the meantime . . ." he said to me, then turned to his wheelman, who'd left his post —along with everybody else on board—to watch the interview, and said, "Damn it, full speed ahead, man! Don't lose sight of that armada!"

Everybody scuttled back where they belonged, and the chase was taken up again.

"No, Rogers, that would never do," Captain Blicks shook his gray head, that eve-

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ning in his cabin. I had suggested that we send a few planes on a straight course ahead of the Spartan Fleet, to perhaps pinpoint Ilium and save us this tiresome tracking.

"Nope," he reiterated. "One sight of a fighter plane roaring over those Greeks, and they'll forget Helen, Sparta and good King Menelaus and spread out so far they'll found a thousand new empires."

"Not to mention calling off the entire Trojan War," I said. "Thereby ruining thousands of future poetic allusions to the beauties of Helen, Greeks bearing gifts, golden apples, and Achilles' heels."

"We'd best be on our guard," Blicks agreed. "One false move by any of us may change the course of history!"

"Considering that we popped back here from the middle of a global war, sir," I said respectfully, "that might not be the *worst* thing that could happen."

"Damn it, *that's* a good point, too," said Captain Blicks. "What to do? What to do?"

"How about we just sort of do what comes naturally, sir, and just hope for the best?" I suggested. "I mean, since there's no way of telling whether our interference will be good or bad for the future."

"I guess we have no other choice," said Captain Blicks. "Soon, very soon, history will be made."

I didn't point out that with or without the *Appomattox*, history would *still* have been made. One Helen is worth a thousand carriers.

"Lo!" said Homer, standing on the bridge beside me and Captain Blicks. "Yon gleam the topless towers of Ilium!"

And yon they gleamed, all right, though they didn't seem tall enough to warrant the appellation "topless." I put this puzzle to Homer as a question.

"Simple, son," he explained. "Labor disputes. Workmen walked off the job, never finished 'em. They got no tops to 'em at all."

"Oh," I said, greatly disappointed.

"Pure hell when it rains," he added.

The mile-distant beach was a jumble of tents, chariots, horses and armor. Up the slope from the beach was a wide, grassy plain, and beyond that the gates—closed, of course—of Troy, ancient Ilium. Somewhere within that bleak stone fortress lan-

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guished the most beautiful woman in the world. Languished for her lover, who had to leave her side to fight this pesky war.

"Things," said Captain Blicks, despondently, "just don't seem as *classical,* somehow, as I'd hoped they'd be."

"I know what you mean, sir," I sighed. "Ten to one, if we get a 'glom' at Helen, she'll be singing, 'The Last Time I Saw Paris', if not 'The Hutsut Song'!"

Homer shrugged. "People are people, son," he pointed out gently. "Oh, antiquity lends some gloss, some glamor, to them, but you always find that they act just like other people. Trouble is, history only records the weighty, more pungent parts of their conversations, and we get a rather false picture of them. They can't talk like that *all* the time! Can you imagine history if everything was set down? At some time in everyone's life, they've all said pret-ty mundane things. How'd you like to hear famous figures quoted as saying, 'Doctor, how can I get rid of ugly pimples?' or 'It musta been something I et' or 'I gotta go potty!'?"

"Stop!" I cried, lapsing into English, but he interpreted the tone of my voice and stopped.

"Whadeesay?" asked Captain Blicks.

"Small talk, sir," I muttered.

We anchored only a few hundred yards from shore, the rocky cove having a fortunately deep draft, and just floated there, watching the campfires springing into life as the hot sun vanished over the horizon.

"Think they'll send someone out to investigate us, sir?" I said, curiously.

"Not after that last investigation," said Captain Blicks, thumbing at Homer. "Hell, our presence will probably force the attack on Ilium, if only because that direction is away from us. If my poetic memory serves me, there are still nine hundred ninety-nine ships we haven't sunk that don't want to tempt the power of our 16-inchers." He chuckled, "They probably think we're *gods,* or something . . ."

I noticed frenzied activity on the beach, and a memory from ancient history class at P.S. 9 in uptown Manhattan stirred in my brain.

"Sir!" I said abruptly. "Those aren't campfires! They're the bowls of catapults!"

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"What? What's that?" asked Blicks.

At that moment, the catapults began flipping their fiery ammunition in long, comet-like arcs. And not at Troy, either.

Blobs of blue-white Greek Fire spattered on the flight deck of the *Appomattox*, ruining the camouflage job wherever they lighted, and dropping over the rim of the strip in sluggish chunks that set fire to our canvas skirt.

"Well," said Blicks, "they *don't* think we're gods!"

"Or they're all atheists," I said.

Blicks grabbed up the phone. "Fire stations!" he bawled. "Get that burning junk off my ship!"

Asbestosed crews with whipping hoses soon had water-blasted the flame-spurting jellies over the side into the black waters of the cove. But the activity on the beach hadn't ceased by a whit —not around the catapults.

"Captain, sir, I believe they're all reloading," I said nervously. Ancient or not, fire was still hot.

"We'd better give them a blast, then," he said.

"At *this* range?" I croaked, envisioning our flight deck suddenly showered with sand, tent-flaps and small shreds of fresh Spartan.

"Just an ammo-blast," he soothed. "No projectile."

He grabbed the phone again, gave the order, and in a few seconds the walls of Ilium, the beach, and the backsides of fleeing catapult-crews were illuminated by a fiery blast of three 16-inchers, followed by a sound like the clap of doom. The blast-wave of the big guns, rushing up the beach, created a momentary sandstorm, and blew down quite a few of the tents. One of the airborne tents tore off its pegs to reveal an armorless Achilles, caught in a position reminiscent of Rodin's *"Le Penseur"*, that is to say, sulking.

"Well," I sighed, "it's too late to save Patroclus, I guess."

"Who?" asked Blicks.

"Long story, sir. Friend of Achilles, went into battle in Achilles' armor, got killed, all the while the hero pouted in his tent."

Suddenly, Homer leaned forward, staring. "Well, will you look at that!" he exclaimed.

I looked. High on the battlements of Ilium, fluttering in the sunset breeze, was a white flag.

"The Trojans—" I said,

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horrified, "they're surrendering!"

"Great Godfrey!" Captain Blicks smacked a hand against his broad forehead. "They think we're part of the Greek Armada. The guns scared the hell out of them!"

"Behold where the gates of Ilium do ope!" said Homer.

I beheld where they oped. They didn't ope for long, just long enough for a small blonde woman to be thrust out, followed by a swiftly tossed bundle of clothing before the portal slammed.

"Helen?" I said to Homer.

"Who else?" he shrugged. "Cassandra?"

I whipped up the binoculars, and, despite the dim light, managed to get a good closeup glance at the face that had launched a thousand ships. It had the Greekest nose I'd ever seen, complicated by close-set eyes and the worst case of acne ever encountered outside a medical journal.

And the blonde hair, I noted with dismay, was an ill-contrived wig.

"*This* is the most beautiful woman in the world?" I choked. It was beyond belief.

Homer nodded. "Sure. *Our* world. The Greek world." He shuddered, slightly. "You ought to see the *rest* of them!"

Captain Blicks, who had grown restless, not understanding a word of our dialogue, grabbed the binoculars from my fingers, nearly throttling me with the lanyard as he did so.

"Helen?" he said eagerly, pointing toward the blonde woman, who was resignedly toting her bundle down toward the beach.

"Yes, sir," I nodded, and as he raised the glasses to his eyes, added tonelessly, "the face that launched a thousand ships!"

He focused on the distant figure, gazed a moment, then slowly took the binoculars from his eyes. "You know," he said thoughtfully, "her face *looks* it!"

"Give up?" asked Homer.

"Might as well," I said. "We'll put you off in a boat. Looks like it's back to 1944 for us."

Homer shrugged. "That's the way the tower topples."

THE END

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EMPATHY

By TOM GODWIN

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

The Sea Tide came roaring in, and Rider struggled his life away to save a girl who was officially classified "animal." "It made no difference," he thought. "Earth is through here anyway."

Earth's expanding galactic empire is built upon friendship and cooperation. It will continue to expand only for as long as we continue to gain the trust and good will of the new worlds encountered.

Since the ships of the Frontier Corps are always the first to land upon these new worlds, there rests upon the Frontier Corpsman a responsibility of paramount importance: he is the example by which the natives will judge the entire human race.

Regardless of obstacles and danger, the Corpsman will to the end fulfill this duty to the best of his ability. That is why he is there.

—From

Frontier Corps Orientation Manual.

THE crisis with the natives was at hand and still the ERB showed no sign of permitting a Frontier Corps officer to make any suggestions.

For the fifth time that day Captain Harold Rider walked up the single dusty street of what had been his Frontier Corps outpost on Deneb Five until the unexpected arrival forty-eight hours before of General Beeling and his Extraterrestrial Relations Board unit. He came to the huge ERB Headquarters prefab at the end of the street. There, still on duty at the door, was the ferret-faced guard who had turned him back twice before.

The guard lounged indolently against the wall, seeming not to see Rider. But when Rider reached out to

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If the little Altairian could escape safely, Rider would not die in vain.

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open the door he came to life with a quick sidestep that barred the way, straightening to attention with his hands brushing his holstered blaster and club.

"No admittance!" he snapped, with the crisp intonation of those who enjoy authority. "General Beeling and the others must not be disturbed, as I told you before."

He added, with deliberate delay, "—sir."

Rider withdrew his reaching hand and considered the pleasure of smashing the pointed chin and walking into the building across the man's stomach. He regretfully dismissed it as wishful dreaming. The feud between the old Frontier Corps and the politically powerful and young ERB was approaching its decisive climax and reached even to Deneb. He was a despised and unwanted superfluity in what had been his own camp and they would like nothing better than an excuse to arrest and confine him.

Quick footsteps sounded inside and the door swung open. It was Colonel Primmer, Beeling's aide, turning with his hand still on the doorknob and almost bowing in the obsequious manner characteristic of him as he said, "You are *so* right, General Beeling. Yes, sir. At once, sir."

He turned again and shut the door behind him. The fawning expression vanished from his red face at the sight of Rider and a cold, fishy look replaced it.

"General Beeling is far too busy to see you," he said, "if that's what you're still waiting for."

"It is," he answered. "Surely he can spare a few minutes. Right now we're two shakes away from a mass attack by the natives and if the chief isn't handled just right when he comes for the last talk this camp will be turned into a slaughter pen. Let me tell—"

"I think," Primmer said, "that the Extraterrestrial Relations Board can successfully cope with a barbarian chieftain without first consulting a layman. As for that other matter with which you've been trying to annoy the general all day: he requested me to inform you that the helicopter will not be available to you, that there are issues before him of a great deal more importance than the life of your talking dog."

Primmer turned to the guard, pointedly dismissing

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Rider. "Go tell Mantingly and Johnson that I want them here on the double. Tell Myers to bring his laborers here—"

Rider turned away and went back down the street, wondering again how he could show Beeling the deadly danger of the situation. It was a hell of a problem—how could you convince a man who wouldn't let you talk to him?

He detoured around a mound of crates—part of the huge mass of ERB equipment and supplies that had been hastily unloaded from the Special Missions cruiser before it hurried back Earthward—and was met by a gust of wind that whipped the fine, poisonous sand against his face. Deneb, almost to the horizon, was going down with a purple halo around it and the desert to the southeast was a smoky azure. He could not tell for sure through the haze but the sky above the distant Sea Cliffs seemed to have turned black.

If a storm was in progress there it would already be too late to take the helicopter more than part way to rescue Laughing Girl, the Altairian. But that made little difference—he had virtually no hope of altering Beeling's disdainful regard for what he called "the talking dogs." The helicopter would remain unavailable and he would have to find some other way of saving her.

Beeling's entire force of laborers and other non-ERB-commissioned personnel was at work along the street, erecting more prefabricated buildings to shelter the supplies. He noticed again the way they spoke to one another in lowered voices and glanced often toward the ragged hills that surrounded the valley. One of them, a red-haired boy, stepped out and spoke to him:

"Sir—could I ask you a question?"

He appraised the boy automatically: Nineteen, a long way from home, and trying not to show that he was scared.

"Of course," he answered. "What is it?"

"Is it true that the natives have been waiting for weeks for this ERB unit to come, so they could kill us all?"

"They didn't even know you existed until you landed here," he said. "Who told you that?"

"Why—" The boy looked suddenly uncomfortable. "I don't remember, sir."

He did not press the ques-

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tion. It would have been something that came down from Beeling or Primmer.

The others had stopped to listen, all of them showing to some degree the same uncertainty that was on the freckled face of the red-haired boy. They were young; the mechanically logical ERB had selected seventeen to twenty-two as the preferred ages for its performers of manual labor since men of that age were the hardiest and made the most efficient workers on worlds not suited to human life.

The ERB encouraged laborer enlistments with colorful posters that promised: GOOD PAY AND HIGH ADVENTURE AWAIT YOU BEYOND THE STARS. The boys had thought, when they landed two days and nights before, that they had stepped across the threshold of the promised high adventure and they had been as excited as children. Now they were solemn and hushed as they tried to adjust themselves to the realization that there would be no adventure, no allure, in quick and violent death . . .

"There may be trouble over your coming," he said, "but it won't be anything that was premeditated. There's a likely chance it won't happen at all. We'll know in a few minutes."

He turned and walked on, feeling them silent and very thoughtful behind him.

At the end of the street was the little building that had been his office until Beeling's arrival with the special orders that had changed the Frontier Corps outpost to an ERB Primary Contact Field Installation. It was there that he and the natives had met and talked so many times in the past and it was there that old Chief Selsin would soon come for what might be the last meeting.

He went inside and saw that his few remaining possessions had been piled in a corner pending further disposal. He walked on to the desk where the hyperspace communicator, borrowed from the Frontier ship, stood locked and silent. One of Beeling's first demands, as new commander of the outpost, had been for the hyperspace communicator's key. Beeling did not need the communicator—he had a similar model in his headquarters building—but a locked communicator could not be used by a displaced Frontier Corpsman to send unauthorized reports to Earth.

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The camp-to-ship radio was beside the communicator. He switched it on, to try again to reach his Frontier ship on Deneb One. The result was the same as before; a shrieking, roaring, ear-splitting blast of static. The sun was squarely between the two worlds and, since it was a white sun, its electronic emission was tremendous. Contact with the ship was utterly impossible.

He changed the wave length to that of the little shortwave radio under the Sea Cliffs and signaled with the Beep button. There was no response, other than a harsh grinding of static from the storm he thought he had seen, which meant that Laughing Girl must still be out tending to the mineral detector.

He switched the radio off, wondering what he could have told her if she had answered him.

"Captain—*rook!*"

Loper, the other shaggy, dog-like Altairian, came running through the door, his eyes bright with excitement.

"Are coming now—oh, hundred and hundreds. Rook, Captain!"

He looked, where a wide, low pass to the northeast led to the higher country beyond, and saw the natives coming down it. There were perhaps five hundred of them, coming with their dragon-beast mounts in a run, their long rifles across their saddles and their bronze battle helmets gleaming brightly in the late sunlight.

There were nine columns and a different pennant fluttered at the head of each. Which meant that the Nine Tribes were solidly allied under the leadership of old Selsin until the business with the humans was settled.

"Are stirr more coming farther back," Loper said. "Pretty soon awr around is wirr be the big rif'res that can kirr us. Why, Captain?" There was puzzled question in his dark eyes. "We not hurt any of them."

"They're afraid we might," he said. "We're getting this one last chance to prove we won't."

"If they not berieve us, how soon wirr they kirr us?"

"I think they'll give us a chance to leave, first."

"But we *can't* reave—our ship is gone."

"That, Loper, is the big, repulsive fly that's in everybody's soup today."

The columns of armed natives split as they reached the bottom of the pass, and raced

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to north and south along the valley's rim.

"They going to surround us," Loper said. "If they say, 'You not pass,' we *have* to have the hericopter." He looked away from the natives and toward the Sea Cliffs. "She die there if we not come and nobody care. I not understand."

To Loper it was still incomprehensible that there could be humans who did not like Altairians. He had known only the men of the Frontier ship, who regarded Altairians with the same affection they would have had for loyal and cheerful — and sometimes blundering — twelve-year-old children. Except when it was time to meet the natives of a new world, when the Altairians' highly developed sense of empathy changed their role to that of invaluable coaches and advisors.

Frontier ships were always undermanned—each year the increasingly huge expenditures of the ERB forced the Space Board to cut the Frontier Corps budget to make up the difference—and the Altairians diligently performed all tasks of which they were capable. When the order came through to have Deneb One surveyed immediately he had needed to send his entire crew and had used Laughing Girl to replace the man tending the electronic mineral detector that had been set up under the Sea Cliffs. It was a job she could manage since the detector was nearly enough automatic in its operation that its supervision required no technical knowledge. This had enabled him to send a full crew to Deneb One while he remained at camp, with Loper to help him, and continued the meetings with the natives.

He had intended to take the helicopter to the Sea Cliffs a safe twenty hours in advance of the Big Tide and bring back Laughing Girl and the portable mineral detector. But Beeling had ordered: "Our only means of transportation will not be permitted to leave this camp until this trouble with the natives is fully settled."

By then it would be too late. The three moons of Deneb Five possessed complex orbits that brought the Big Tide every ten days; a titanic bulge in the waters of the oceans that raced around the world at a speed of five hundred miles per hour. The three moons were already on the opposite side of the world, swinging close around

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it and bringing the Big Tide with them. It would strike the high, unscalable Sea Cliffs at sunrise and Laughing Girl, still faithfully tending the detector down under them and waiting for him to come for her, would be killed instantly.

To the few of the ERB staff he had managed to talk to, his persistent requests for the helicopter had seemed ridiculous. "Really, Captain," one natty young lieutenant he had cornered outside Headquarters had said, "you're taking the loss of your mascot far too seriously. After all, you can pick up a dozen of the beasts the next time you pass Altair." . . .

"We not got much time, Captain. Are we have to wait much ronger?"

"Not much longer, Loper. Only until the talk with Selsin is over."

"I think he come now."

The long columns were still coming down the pass and parting at the bottom but one native was coming straight toward the camp in a slow trot. It was Selsin.

"—lively there! Faster, all of you . . ."

The voice of Primmer, edged with strain, came from the street. Rider went to the window and looked out upon a scene of confused activity.

Primmer, with two blasters buckled around him, was trying to post as many guards as possible as quickly as possible; all the laborers and technicians among them. They were being stationed around Headquarters, around the helicopter, and all along the windows of supplies in the street.

"Damn!" he said aloud.

Beeling could have done nothing worse than to order the show of armed defense at a time when everything depended upon regaining Selsin's trust.

The door of the ERB Headquarters building opened and General Beeling stepped out, briskly despite his paunchy overweight. He strode down the street with his pink moonface looking straight ahead, not glancing once toward the natives. He stopped a moment to say something to Primmer that caused most of Primmer's nervousness to vanish then came on with the bearing of calm purpose.

"He not worried," Loper said. "How can he not worry now?"

Beeling stepped through the doorway with cold satisfaction on his face and a look at Rider that said, *I have your*

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muddled situation well in hand, my man.

"Good afternoon, General," Rider greeted him, and Loper said politely, "Her'ro, Generar Beering."

Beeling's eyes flicked to Loper in brief curiosity then, without answering either of them, he seated himself behind the desk.

"I presume you know we're surrounded, Rider?"

There was the same vengeful satisfaction in his tone as on his face. Rider noticed, absently, that his blouse bulged with the bulk of a concealed blaster.

"I knew they would come ready for war," he said. "When Selsin gets here we'll have our one last chance to avert it and I've been trying to see you all day to tell you we'll have to show Selsin the respect that—"

"My dear Captain," Beeling interrupted, "I have been very busy the entire day supervising a review of all data and deciding upon the best method of counteracting the damage you have done. I feel rather certain that I know how to speak to the native."

Rider kept his face expressionless and said with careful courtesy, "But couldn't you order the guards off duty before Selsin gets here, sir? He'll regard them as proof of suspicion and enmity on our part."

The soft answer seemed to have slightly lessened Beeling's dislike for him; Beeling's next statement was more pompous than sarcastic:

"On the contrary, that display of preparedness will prove to the natives that we are quite aware of their hostility and are not to be intimidated by it; that our request for friendship is sincere and does not spring from fear of them."

Rider looked again at the guards, able to count only seven blasters among them, and back to Beeling. "You don't understand, sir—if they call our bluff we won't have a chance."

Beeling's reply was to spread a sheaf of papers on the desk before him and say:

"Here are the Analysis Sheets; the result of almost two days of work by myself and my staff and our computer. For your information, these natives are like children both in the awe and fear with which they regard our weapons and in their eagerness to possess the labor-saving machines, the luxury items and the pretty novelties of our 'grown-up' society. By dramatically presenting the two

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choices—the gift-laden helping hand or the unyielding fist—they cannot logically do other than ask for our friendship and gifts."

"But it isn't that simple," he protested. "They'll—"

Annoyance passed across Beeling's face and the full degree of coldness returned. "As I remarked, the procedure outlined by the Analysis will counteract the damage you have done. Insufficient data, however, leave two questions unanswered. One: why have your reports never mentioned the consistent enmity of the natives?"

"Because no enmity ever existed. They were only exercising reasonable caution, due to the experience they had with that other alien race forty years ago."

"Yes? Then perhaps you can answer the other question: why should this 'reasonable caution' flare so suddenly into a lust for war? *What did you do to make them hate humans so?"*

"I lied to them. They were almost ready to agree to everything but they wanted a little more time in which to be sure that we would not betray their trust as that other alien race did. I gave my solemn promise as the representative of Earth that no reinforcements would come in the meantime. And within forty-eight hours after receiving its copy of my report to the Frontier Corps, the ERB had you and thirty men and a hundred tons of supplies on the way to Deneb.

"Just what do you suppose the natives thought of my truthfulness—of the truthfulness of any human—when that cruiser dropped down out of the sky and men and equipment began rolling out of it?"

"I see," Beeling said acidly. "You were the innocent victim of unfair circumstances. But, as the ERB informed the Supreme Council, you had accomplished nothing concrete in your six months here and this world was too badly needed by Earth to permit any more cautious delays. Despite anguished wails of protest from the Frontier Corps we persuaded the Supreme Council to transfer command of this outpost to the ERB. I was dispatched at once to analyze the situation, to remedy whatever mistakes you had made, and to gain the cooperation of the natives as quickly as possible.

"I trust"—the acidic dislike increased—"that properly explains my presence here."

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Loper lifted his ears toward the door and Rider heard the squeak of saddle leather.

"I hope your plans work out the way you think," he said. "Selsin is here."

Selsin was so big that his bulk in the doorway half darkened the room as he came through. He was seven feet tall, black as coal, with muscles that bulged and rippled as he walked. He had the thin, curved nose and pointed ears of a devil, while his green, glittering eyes under slanting brows added to his satanic appearance.

His bristling blue-gray head was bare; he had left his helmet on his saddle, together with his rifle and sword, as a gesture of peaceful intention.

"Chief Selsin!" Beeling rose, smiling. "You honor us. I'm sorry there was no one to meet you—I told my aide—"

"It is of no importance." Selsin spoke in accented Terran. "I came to hear you, not your assistant."

"Ah—of course. Will you sit down?"

Selsin did so, the chair creaking under his weight. He waited for Beeling to speak, regarding him with a mocking half smile. The smile was meaningless—the cheek muscles of the natives were different from those of humans and caused their lips to turn upward at the corners—but it could be rather disconcerting to a human at first.

Beeling cleared his throat. "I see you came alone. At the end of our brief meeting yesterday I requested that all nine of you tribal chiefs come again this afternoon so I could tell all of you that I am here to help you."

"You told us that yesterday," Selsin said. "I came today to hear your proof."

"Ah—of course."

Beeling looked down at the Analysis Sheets, a touch of uncertainty in his manner. It's all right, Rider thought as he watched him, to speak of handling the natives as one would handle children—but it's a little hard to hang onto that conception when the child is a three-hundred-pound black devil sitting two yards in front of you.

Beeling looked up from the Analysis. "We want the friendship of your race," he said to Selsin, "and your race needs our friendship. We are here on your world only to help you"—stern reproof came into Beeling's voice—"and yet you foolishly prepare to attack us with your puny rifles!"

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Selsin's expression did not change. He answered in the emotionless manner of one stating unalterable facts:

"We do not, and have never, wanted war. But the promise your world made to mine was a lie and your second ship came, bringing more men and great stacks of strange objects which we fear are weapons—and which you are now guarding as one would guard weapons. We do not know how many more of your ships may be on the way, now, with still more men and weapons. We can only hope that if we must fight for our world, we have not waited too long."

"Your suspicions are baseless, your plans foolhardy," Beeling said with admonishing sternness. "Consider, friend Selsin; think of the terrible price an attack would cost you. You would meet certain defeat — and you would *forever forfeit our* friendship and our gifts!"

Selsin's black face seemed to turn even darker and his teeth flashed in a quick snarl. "Forty years ago we were offered friendship and gifts, as you are doing, by another alien race—the *gini-deglin,* the three-eyed ones. They needed metal to repair their ship and we used all our supply of charcoal to smelt the ores we had mined for them, for they had told us they were very grateful and would within a year bring us an atomic furnace so we would never have to hoard charcoal again. Then, on the day they finished repairing their ship, they turned their weapons on us. They butchered thirty, to take along as fresh meat. Three others were killed with a gas that would not mar their appearance, so they could be stuffed and placed in a museum. A man, a woman, and a child—and the child was my sister!"

Selsin leaned toward Beeling, his devil's face ugly with the hatred the memory aroused.

"To them we were only animals who had served their purpose. Their pretense of friendship was a lie—we should have killed them all when their ship crashed!"

Beeling's chair squealed as he shoved it back and his hand pawed at the buttons of his blouse, reaching in for the concealed blaster. His hand closed around the butt of it and he held it there, still concealed, as he appraised Selsin with wary thoughtfulness. Rider spoke quickly, before he could say or do something that would destroy the last

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faint hope of regaining Selsin's trust.

"The three-eyed-ones kill and take specimens from every world they visit, Chief Selsin. Someday our ships will meet them and they will want some humans as specimens, too. They are already our enemies as well as yours."

Selsin settled back in his chair and his anger faded.

"We have thought of that," he said. "We had hoped that your race would be our ally should they ever return. But now—does it matter whether a race is killed for food and specimens or killed to get it out of the way for world-wide mining operations?"

Rider told Selsin again, for what would probably be the last time, why his world was needed by humans:

"Earth's policy strictly forbids colonizing a world against the wishes of its inhabitants. This world is doubly forbidden—beryllium is present in the dust over all its surface, in a form that would be fatal to humans within two years.

"But we need domed repair and refueling bases here for our exploration, survey and colonization ships bound for worlds farther on. This is the only world within three hundred light-years that has metals for repairs, and that has the rare earths and elements that make our ships' hyperspace drives possible. You have such an abundance on this world that fifty centuries from now we would have used less than one-tenth of one per cent, yet that small amount is so necessary to us that if we cannot have it we will have to abandon all further exploration in this sector of space."

When he had finished Selsin sat still and thoughtful, his green eyes unwaveringly on Rider's as though trying to see inside Rider's mind and know that he spoke without deceit. Rider had the feeling that Selsin's suspicions were wavering before an almost desperate desire to believe.

Then Beeling, his composure regained, jerked his chair back to the desk with another noisy squeal. He cleared his throat in a profound manner, ready to resume the talk with Selsin, and Rider crossed his fingers with a wordless prayer that something would happen to interrupt him before he could again anger Selsin.

The interruption came: a signal beep from the radio beside the hyperspace communicator, the call from

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Laughing Girl at the Sea Cliffs.

Rider stepped to the radio, reaching past the scowling Beeling to turn the volume to maximum. A muffled roaring filled the room when he did so, static grinding and crashing through it.

"Go ahead, Girl," he said into the transmitter.

"A awrfur storm come, Boss"—Laughing Girl's voice was hard to hear through the roaring—"from off the sea—a wind that tear down the detector and scatter our record tapes and I try to find them but it are so dark with brack crouds and rain and then the sea come in and things are in it, things that—"

A louder roaring drowned out her voice. He waited, knowing that she was frightened. Whenever she was scared and faced with problems too great for her, she called him "Boss" and talked in the quick, rushing manner of a child.

Her voice came in again:

"—and then they see me rooking for the record tapes and they run after me, awrfur big things with craws and beaks, and they are stirr coming and I have no prace to hide. Terr me what to do, Boss—"

"Run to the cliffs!" he ordered, in his mind the vision of the lumbering horde of two-ton Elephant Crabs closing in on her. "Climb as far as you can up that crevice in the cliffs—they're too big to follow you in—and wait for me."

"Wirr you come for me soon—before the Big Tide?"

"I'll be there. Now, run!"

"Okay, Boss—I run."

He lifted his hand to the switch, then paused as he heard deep, jarring sounds through the wind's roaring. Four seconds later there was a loud crashing, a snap, and sudden silence. The monsters had smashed the transmitter in their pursuit of Laughing Girl.

He switched off his own transmitter and said in answer to Beeling's questioning, irritated look, "A local tornado. Sometimes one will precede the Big Tide and push a small tide ahead of it."

"They awrfur crose behind her," Loper said. He looked at Beeling with worry and accusation in his yes. "We are supposed to go after her yesterday but you say, 'No.' Now, maybe awready they are catch her and kirr her."

Beeling glanced at Loper with the same momentary curosity he had exhibited be-

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fore, then he gave his full attention to Selsin. He began in a tone of smooth sincerity:

"You are an exceptionally intelligent person, Chief Selsin, or you would never have risen to your position as leader. Therefore, I know you are far too wise to betray the trust of your people in you by making the wrong choice of the two kinds of future offered your world.

"Should you refuse to cooperate with us, we would be forced to reroute our ships through other sectors of space and your world would see no more of us for centuries to come. You would continue to stagnate here—you are no doubt aware that the resources of your world are such that you can never leave it without our help. Your unlimited wealth of minerals is of no use to you—you have no coal deposits, no trees, nothing but scrawny shrubs with which to make a meager supply of charcoal for smelting. There is no oil on your world; you have no fuel for steam engines or internal combustion engines. Your environment will force you to remain in a state of barbarism, nomads in animal skins, with privation your only known way of life.

"This we can alter for you, in wonderous ways beyond your imagining. We will give you atomic furnaces, processing plants, manufacturing machinery. We will help you build factories that will produce not only all the things you need but also luxuries beyond counting—the very same luxury goods our own society uses! And we will give you costless and unlimited power for your factories and homes and vehicles by showing you how to get it out of a rock which is to be found all over your world; a magic rock we call 'uranium' but for which you probably don't even have a name."

Beeling paused, as though for effect. He was smiling at Selsin, very sure of himself.

"Choose, Chief Selsin! Will you condemn your race to a future of poverty and stagnation by refusing to cooperate with us? Or will you give them all the achievements and luxuries of a civilization three thousand years in advance of theirs—will you be the wise leader and accept this tremendous payment which we offer for merely your race's friendship?"

Selsin stood up, on his face an anger and hatred such as Rider had never seen. He looked down at Beeling and gave

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his answer in words that came like the spitting of a tiger:

"My people's insignificant friendship is not for sale today, human!"

Beeling gaped in incredulous disbelief.

"You—*refuse?*"

Selsin turned to Rider.

"We believed your promise, until your reinforcements came. Even then we still had a faint hope that you humans were sincere. Now I know we were wrong. It is better so."

"You know we can't prove our good intentions," Rider answered. "Not here and now, in this room."

"I realize that. But I wanted to know the attitude of your superior toward my race. As he regarded us, so likely would all the others who would follow him. My people and I wanted to know if we would be regarded with respect, or if we would be dismissed as an inferior species to be used for human purposes.

"I learned. We are backward barbarians, simple savages who can be bought and then ignored."

Through the anger on Selsin's face something like regret showed for a moment, something like a look of farewell.

"I do not think it is your fault—but you are one of them and responsible with them. This is our world and we will live here and fight here and die here—but we will be no race's inferiors here."

Then the regret was gone as Selsin turned back to Beeling.

"You will be given until sunrise tomorrow to recall your ship and leave this world. If you and all the other humans are not gone by then, we will have no choice but to remove you."

Then, not waiting for an answer, Selsin strode to the door.

Beeling half rose, still gaping with amazement. "*Wait—*"

The door closed behind Selsin's broad back and Beeling ordered sharply, "Call him back, Rider! Something is wrong—he didn't understand my offer."

Rider listened to Selsin's dragon-beast departing in a fast trot. "He understood you," he said to Beeling. "But you cooked our goose by not understanding him."

"He failed to comprehend," Beeling said flatly. "Or else—and I'll have that question put to the computer—he's bluffing, trying to extort still

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more from us. In either case, he knows we can't leave here; he knows the Special Missions cruiser has gone back to Earth and the Frontier ship can't receive our signals."

"He didn't believe that explanation yesterday and he doubly doesn't today."

"Something is wrong," Beeling said again. "The Analysis showed the natives to want all the things I offered him. They don't even have wooden-wheeled carts — and yet, instead of the grateful acceptance that the Analysis predicted, the native's reaction was one of irrational enmity."

"Didn't you know the Analysis was meaningless drivel?" he asked.

Beeling jerked up his head with a shocked expression, as though Rider had uttered an obscene heresy. "What do you mean by that?"

"All your calculations are based on the assumption that the species being studied is as emotionlessly logical as one of your computers. That worked once, with that ant-like race on Medusa, and it was played up by the ERB politicians until now most of the Supreme Council believes the ERB claim that relations with alien life forms has been reduced to an exact science by the ERB and the slow methods of the Frontier Corps are worthlessly obsolete. But the ERB has failed on every world since Medusa, even though you've kept the fact covered up, and now you've failed here. I tried to tell you, from the day you came, that Selsin and his race are proud individualists and it would be a fatal mistake to try to convert them into mathematical equations."

Beeling smoothed the Analysis under his fingers. "We made a mistake; the mistake of depending upon a Frontier Corps layman to procure adequate data for our Analysis, among which would have been Selsin's emotional instability. It is a mistake that will not happen again. I can assure you."

"I suppose you'll send a full report of this to Earth, at once?"

"A most complete report. Why do you ask?" Beeling answered.

"Because in the morning you're going to die, and I, and all those kids out there, and you can try to prevent such a thing happening again by telling not the ERB but the Supreme Council exactly what caused it."

"I assure you, the ERB will

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properly present the facts to the Council."

"No—not the true facts. You know that, Beeling."

"*General* Beeling. And what are you trying to say—are you asking me to omit mention of the incompetence on your part that created this situation?"

"I'm asking you to tell the Council that you followed all the rules in the ERB textbooks and did exactly what the Analysis told you to do and that you and everyone here is going to die because you did so. Tell them that if a form of life behaved according to absolutely predictable rule and logic it wouldn't be anything intelligent—it would be a vegetable."

Beeling smoothed out the Analysis sheets again. "Do you really think I might give my superiors hysterical nonsense like that?"

He knew that further argument would be useless. He had already explained to Beeling that a Frontier Corpsman, or any man first meeting an alien race, had to base his actions upon the reactions of the natives; he had to develop something like a sixth sense in detecting their emotions and let that be his guide or he would become enmeshed in misunderstandings that would result in death for him and the loss of the new world for Earth.

Beeling had refused to listen and had laughed outright when Rider told him the Altairians were far better than any human sixth sense; that all Frontier and ERB ships should carry Altairians and that the ERB's erroneous classification of the Altairian race as "Animals" unjustly condemned them to continuing half-starvation on their rocky, barren world by denying them the assistance that Earth's empire gave to all needy forms of life that had been classified as "Intelligent inhabitants."

Loper moved restlessly, sensing his emotions and disturbed by them. He spoke with the suddenness and frankness of a child:

"Once Sersin awrmost berieve us, Captain. He come in thinking with question and uncertain, and hoping very much we are his friends but afraid we not be. Then you terr how we need *his* friendship and not ever harm his race even if they not want to be our friends. Sersin rook at you he awrmost happy, awrmost ready to berieve you, then Generar Beering speak

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about awr the things humans have that Sersin's race don't have and say very proud, 'We give you awr these things for mer'rey your friendship,' and Sersin get mad and not hope at awr anymore, and when he reave he thinking of fighting and kirring. He not rike, but he know it have to be. Why it have to be?"

"You have the animal well coached," Beeling observed. "Its ability to relate a witnessed incident proves your claim that Altairians are telepathic, I presume?"

"Loper was aware of Selsin's emotions before he ever walked into this room. It isn't telepathy; it's a highly developed sense of empathy. It serves the same purpose."

"I'm afraid your naive trust in the animal's power of—"

Beeling never finished the sentence. A drum was suddenly beating along the near side of the valley; a hard, fast stuttering that rose sharp and clear above the whining of the wind.

"What is that?" Beeling demanded.

"A signal drum, sending the word around the circumference of the valley."

"The word?" For an instant Beeling's face registered blankness. "Do you mean they really intend to attack us?"

"Good Lord—haven't you realized that yet?"

Beeling chewed his lip, his face thoughtful, then shook his head. "You must be wrong. The Analysis showed that they wouldn't dare attack us."

"The Analysis also showed you how to win Selsin's friendship—remember?"

Beeling looked thoughtful again. "If your guess is correct, we'll have to prepare an impenetrable defense system. How many heavy weapons do you have here, and what kind?"

"The ship's blasters are always the prime defense weapons of a Frontier unit. There are a few other weapons on the ship, too—but now everything is on the other side of the sun. There's one hand blaster in my room, and we have the ten blasters your men brought."

"*One?*—you have *one* blaster here?" Beeling glared, "I thought you had a supply of weapons—must every action of a Frontier man be one of mindless bungling?"

"I was trying to make friends with the natives, not kill them."

"Eleven hand blasters to stand off thousands of blood-

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thirsty savages . . ." Beeling chewed his lip again. "How long can we hold the natives off with eleven blasters?"

"About as long as a snowball would remain firm in hell."

"We need the ship—how incredibly stupid of you to send it away. Our lives are in the balance—"

"Rook!" The voice of Loper interrupted, from where he had moved to the north window. "A smoke signar are going up, too."

Beeling swung with such haste that he knocked the Analysis sheets off the desk. A tall, black column of smoke was standing up from the high hill at the valley's head. It could be seen for miles, despite the angle at which the wind was making it lean, and it was rolling blacker and higher by the second.

"That will be to summon all the reserve forces from the highlands," Rider said. "They think we're well armed and they'll hit us with everything they have."

Beeling's nervous movement as he turned back to Rider changed abruptly to decision.

"There's only one thing we can do—evacuate. We'll use the helicopter."

Rider shook his head. "The helicopter is small, for scouting, and can't carry more than three. It's five hundred miles to the nearest safe refuge, the Northern Islands, and the helicopter carries fuel for seven hundred miles. It would be a one-way trip."

"We'll go as soon as you can check the helicopter for the flight."

"We?"

"Colonel Primmer has had only a few hours flying time and I have had none. You will be our pilot."

He shook his head again. "I'm as afraid to die in the morning as the next man but I'll be damned if I could run like *that*."

Annoyance passed across Beeling's face. "You will obey my order and forget the heroic ideals. It would be only stupid for all to die when some can be saved with the helicopter."

"I agree. But why not let everybody cut cards or draw straws so all would have the same chance?"

"This Field Installation is not a gambling casino. Furthermore, there is an ERB regulation which reads: *In times of critical danger and limited transportation the unit commander will arrange for the survival of his command in the order of each in-*

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dividual's importance to the unit as a whole."

"I see," he said, and thought: So in the ERB you do even your running by the book?

Beeling began hastily scribbling a note. "This is an order to Colonel Primmer, authorizing you to go past the helicopter guards. Make sure you overlook nothing in preparing it for the trip."

"I have other things to do. Primmer can check it."

Beeling stopped writing and his face hardened dangerously under its pink softness. "As commander of this outpost and your superior officer, I can have you locked up in chains for insubordination if I wish to. Would you prefer that?"

"It still wouldn't force me to be your pilot. Anyway, you needn't worry about my absence—the helicopter is easily enough handled that Primmer can land you safely at your destination."

He saw that the sun was setting, already a bright, molten sliver on the horizon, and he turned to Loper.

"Run to the storage shed and get me that coil of small rope. I'm ready to start."

"Where are you going?" Beeling demanded, suspicion in his eyes and his hand reaching inside his blouse.

Loper ran to the door, using both paws to turn the knob. He slammed it shut behind him and Rider saw him race past the window, where the spinning, wind-blown dust half obscured the ground. It was a good thing, he thought, that the Altairians were immune to beryllium poisoning. Loper and Laughing Girl would never see any other world again . . .

"Where are you going?"

"The Sea Cliffs," he answered.

"Do you think you can hide from the natives there?"

"Not to hide. To keep my promise to Laughing Girl. The Big Tide is coming and she can't escape it."

Beeling stared, as though he had babbled gibberish.

"You — you're going to walk forty miles through beryllium dust, through armed natives and man-killing beasts, to save an animal— and yet you refuse to lift a hand to help save the lives of your fellow human beings?"

"Or, to be specific, the lives of you and Primmer. That's right."

He went to the corner where his remaining possessions lay and swung the stillfull canteen from his shoul-

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der. He kicked his respirator to one side—he would never need it again—and picked up the long-bladed knife.

He shoved the knife in his belt and said to Beeling, "I'm leaving my blaster for the others to use."

Beeling withdrew his own blaster from his blouse and laid it on the desk with the muzzle pointing toward Rider. His hand continued to rest on it as he stared at Rider with cold savage calculation.

The door banged open and a gust of wind scattered the pages of the Analysis across the floor as Loper plunged through. The coil of rope was in his mouth and he was panting from his running as he dropped it at Rider's feet.

"Are you ready to go, Captain—can we hurry now, prease?"

"Just a minute, Rider—"

Beeling reached out with the transmitter key in his left hand and unlocked the hyperspace communicator. His right hand did not leave the blaster.

"You might be interested in knowing what my report will be," he said. He flipped on the signal switch.

"I suppose I already know," Rider answered. "I ask you to overlook our personal differences and tell them the real cause behind tomorrow's massacre. It could go a long way toward saving the lives of others in the future."

Beeling nodded, smiling. "Such a report is precisely what I have in mind. I feel they should know how your blundering Frontier Corps methods had stirred the natives into such a murderous anti-human frenzy that my ERB unit arrived too late to remedy the situation. I shall point out that every world lost by the ERB was due to the incompetence of the Frontier men who preceded the ERB units there and created hatred and distrust among the natives. I shall point out the tragic mistake of continuing to permit Frontier Corps laymen to try to assume the duties of ERB specialists and I shall urge that the Supreme Council let this be the last bloody sacrifice by passing the Harriman Proposal now before it; the proposal that would dissolve the Frontier Corps and place all its ships and men under ERB supervision.

"And it is my duty"—Beeling's smile was as vindictive as the sting of a wasp—"to report your actions of this afternoon; your flagrant insubordination, your flat re-

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fusal to assist in transporting others to safety, your desertion in time of danger, your flight to the Sea Cliffs, leaving the rest of us to do the fighting."

It required a few seconds for Rider to comprehend the extent of Beeling's malice, then he said, "I thought you were only inexperienced and too blind to see. I didn't know the half of it, did I?"

"It should be obvious to you what my report will do to the Frontier Corps when it's read before the Supreme Council."

It was very obvious. Beeling's report would be the climax of the ERB's all-out effort to absorb the Frontier Corps. The already delicately balanced scales would be tipped, the Harriman Proposal would be passed, and the Corps would cease to exist . . .

"Do you still want to go to the Sea Cliffs?" Beeling asked.

He saw Beeling's prime objective. Beeling was still afraid to let the inexperienced Primmer be his pilot.

"Suppose I should decide to be your pilot?" he asked.

"I certainly couldn't report you as a deserter. In fact, I might find it possible to forget to mention several of the facts concerning you and the Frontier Corps."

He did not reply at once and Beeling added, "What is the welfare of an animal compared with your life and the existence of the Frontier Corps to which, I understand, you and the others have dedicated your lives?"

Loper made a whining sound, looking up at Rider with his face twisted in apprehension.

"What are he mean?" Then he read the answer in the conflicting emotions of the two men and his question came like a despairing whimper, "Are it *have* to be that way?"

The hyperspace communicator blinked an orange light and said in a metallic voice:

"Extraterrestrial Relations Board, Communications Center."

Beeling spoke into the transmitter: "Connect me with General Supervision, Classified AA circuit." He turned to Rider. "Which will you take, Rider?"

It seemed to him that he could see the two alternative courses of events with vivid clarity. He could see the dissolution of the Frontier Corps, his name in the records as a coward who had run in vain—and he could see Laughing Girl crouching cold and scared in the crevice, trusting him to come for her

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before the black tide rushed out of the dawn to kill her, knowing in her child-like mind that he would be there in time as surely as she and Loper had raced to him in time that night on Vulcan when he lay injured and helpless under the cliff and the moon wolves were gathering around him for the kill . . .

"Office of General Supervision," the communicator said. *"Classified AA. Give us your report."*

"A moment, please," Beeling said to it. To Rider he said, "I give you exactly ten seconds—which will it be?"

Which would it be? Death and infamy at the Sea Cliffs—and know that to the end he had done what seemed right and just to him? Or life and safety and an unmarred record on the Northern Islands, while Laughing Girl died still waiting for him and he knew he was a coward no less than Beeling?

"Now!"

There was the brittle snap of ultimatum in Beeling's single word. He gave his answer:

"I'm going to the Sea Cliffs."

For a moment Beeling sat rigid, so sure had he been that the answer would be the one he wanted. Then he leaned forward, his lips thin and white with the intensity of his hatred and his words half choking in his throat:

"You fool—you incredible fool! I can legally shoot you down where you stand as a deserter!"

The muzzle of the blaster tilted up. Loper's eyes went fire-bright with understanding and his claws ripped at the floor as he threw himself back, into position to leap at Beeling's throat. Rider reached for the knife in his belt, warned by Loper's action and knowing he would never live to throw it. Beeling, in the insanity of his rage, was going to fire—

"Sir, the natives are—"

Primmer burst into the room and the scene froze. Primmer gawked at Beeling's blaster, at Rider's hand reaching for the knife, then he seized his own blasters and leveled them waveringly on Rider.

"Don't touch that knife!" he commanded. He turned his red face to Beeling. "What is it, sir—what is he trying to do?"

Slowly, almost regretfully, Beeling let his grip on the blaster relax.

"A little matter of desertion," he said to Primmer. He spoke to Rider. "I've changed my mind. You are experienced

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in eluding danger on alien worlds and you might have a good chance of hiding from the natives until a ship comes to pick you up. I hope so. I want you to live, to sit in your death row cell and read about the end of the Frontier Corps before they take you out and hang you as a deserter and a coward."

He motioned toward the door with a quick jerk of the blaster. "Now go! Get out of this room!"

Rider picked up the coil of rope and started toward the door, Beeling's blaster following him. Primmer spoke in protest:

"But General Beeling! As a deserter he should be held for proper punishment, sir—"

Beeling silenced him with a hard look and turned to the communicator. He began his report:

"General David A. Beeling, Unit Twenty, Deneb Five. Subjects: Impending attack of native armies, due to erroneous reports and general incompetence of Frontier Corps commander Captain Harold Rider; Report of Captain Rider's rebellion and desertion on eve of attack; Details of dangerous impractibility of Frontier Corps methods and—"

The words faded away, drowned by the wind, as Rider and Loper went down the street.

"He rie," Loper said. "They can't berieve him, can't ever hang you, can they?"

He smiled a little. "No, they won't be able to hang me."

He angled across the street, toward the edge of the daggerbrush thicket, and passed not far from one of the guards. It was the red-haired boy, facing the enemy lines with his weapon, a crate hammer, gripped tightly in his hand. Rider saw the code number on the supplies he guarded: XG-B-193.

"I'll be damned," he said.

"What are he guarding?" Loper asked.

"Exchange items and goodwill gifts that the ERB has designated as suitable for barbaric cultures of this type. He's supposed to fight to the death to protect three thousand pounds of glass beads, hand mirrors, and bright red toy magnets."

They went into the thicket and the camp was hidden from view. The winding course of an old animal trail led in the desired direction and they followed it until it skirted the base of a small hill. He climbed to the top of it, with Loper at his heels, and

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looked back at the camp. There was a great deal of activity around the helicopter and he could distinguish Primmer standing to one side and directing the refueling operations.

He looked to the southeast, along his route to the sea, and along the rocky ridge that lay like a barrier between he saw the natives waiting and watching.

"I think," Loper said, "that they not want us to pass. I think we fight there, Captain."

"You'll stay here, on this hill," he said.

"Stay?" Loper jerked up his head in surprise and defiance. "No!"

"That's an order. I want you to watch the camp until after it's all over with tomorrow."

"I not stay safe whire you fight arone!" Loper braced his forepaws wide-apart and stubborn on the ground. "I not do it!"

He sat down on a sun-blackened boulder. "Listen, Loper—listen to the reasons why you have to help me:

"The government of Earth is four hundred light-years away and they will have to believe Beeling's story; that the natives are treacherous and hate all humans and that the Frontier Corps goaded them into massacring the entire camp. The natives are honest in their fear and distrust of humans—they think they are fighting for their world—and there will be no one after tomorrow to tell them they are wrong.

"Except you and Laughing Girl. They might listen to you Altairians since you know humans well and yet aren't human. You must tell them that Earth never takes a world by force, that even Beeling meant well but did not understand, and that all the things I told them Earth would do for them would have been done. And you must stay here until after tomorrow morning and watch the camp so that when a ship comes from Earth to investigate you can tell the officers exactly what happened here and what caused it to happen. It will be too late to save the Frontier Corps but if they will listen to you it might not be too late for them to see the mistakes that have been made and start over again."

The rigid stubbornness was gone from Loper, understanding and dark misery in its place. "It wrong—everything are happen awr wrong and I never see you again!"

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"Yes," he said, "everything is all wrong and shot to hell. I'm trying to salvage the remains the best I can and I have to have your help."

"I do everything you say, Captain."

"For some time this will be your world and Laughing Girl's. Maybe for all your lives. So be friends with the natives and don't blame them for what they did. Remember that."

"Yes, sir. I remember."

He looked at the sunset's violet afterglow and stood up. "I'll have to hurry or I won't get there in time. Good luck, Loper."

"Good-bye, Captain. I—I sorry."

He turned and went down the hill and across the flat beyond. He looked back when he was almost to the ridge and saw Loper still staring forlornly after him.

He reached the foot of the ridge and climbed its steep slope. Three natives were waiting for him on top, their long rifles in their hands and the smiles on their faces. The one in the center was Resso, a sub-chief in Selsin's tribe.

"Where would you go, human?" Resso asked in the native language.

"I would go to the sea," he answered in the same language, and told them why. "I ask permission to pass," he said.

Resso rubbed the breach of his rifle, his eyes thoughtful and hard. "Between here and the sea are many by-paths. You might lose your way and be troublesome for us to find in the morning."

He took the long knife from his belt, spun it in the air and caught it by the blade. The three rifles centered on him as he did so.

"This is my only weapon," he said to Resso. "I think I can put it in your throat before I can be killed—but I ask you to let me save the Altairian first and match it against your rifles tomorrow."

Resso spit on the ground. "Tomorrow I will make you eat it before I kill you."

Rider felt a great sense of relief—Resso was going to let him pass . . .

"I want to ask a favor of you," he said to Resso. "That the Altairians not be harmed."

Surprise showed on Resso's face. "Why should we harm the furry ones? They are only your slaves and not responsible for what humans do."

"Then you promise?" he asked.

Resso took a step forward, glowering in quick anger. "Do

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you have the insolence to question what I say? Be on your way—run, human, and find your hiding place!"

He went, walking past them with the glum thought: This makes Ignominious Exit Number Two. I hope my last one, tomorrow, will have at least a little dignity to it . . .

The desert was forty miles of red iron sand, across which rocky ridges lay like a hundred randomly flung barriers. Some of the ridges were of limestone, honey-combed with natural caves. These he would have to avoid at all costs since they were the lairs of the ten-foot sand hounds.

He was no more than well started when dark came. He had no light and without a blaster he would not dare to use one if he had it. It would attract the attention of sand hounds for miles around.

For the greater part, his way was along relatively clear stretches of the wind-packed sand and his progress was fairly fast. At intervals, however, he came to dense and wide-spreading thickets of the poison-thorned desert vegetation and these he had to by-pass with time consuming detours.

Once he almost walked upon a band of wild dragon-beasts, grazing silently in the starlight. Only the good fortune of the wind being in his favor preventing them from detecting him and charging. He had to backtrack and then climb a long ridge to get around them. It cost him an hour of time.

The last of the clouds disappeared from the eastern sky as the storm went its way across the Southern Gulf. He was grateful that it had not swerved inland and turned the dim starlight into total darkness. His time margin would be small, at best.

Shortly before midnight he stopped on a sand dune, to rest for the first time. It was there that he saw a tiny, distant red spark; a signal fire on the hill north of camp. It blinked for several minutes in the code he did not understand, then went out.

When it did not reappear at the end of two more minutes he got up and resumed his journey to the sea.

Not long afterward the sky to the east turned pale; a whiteness that grew swiftly brighter and obscured the eastern stars. It was the dawn of the three moons; the moons that brought the Big Tide with them.

They lifted above the horizon in a flying wedge

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formation, flooding the desert with cold, white light. He could see well, then, and he hurried faster down the long slopes that led to the sea.

The bright moonlight greatly increased the danger of being seen by a sand hound and he had not gone far when one screamed from somewhere behind him. He stopped, and looked back.

He could not see it but he saw something else when he looked to the rocky ridge west of him; flitting shadow-shapes that seemed to be dragon-beasts were keeping pace with him. He wondered if it would be Resso and the others, making certain he would not be hard to find when morning came. They were gone from view before he could be sure he had not imagined seeing them.

He hurried on again. The character of the desert had changed as the elevation decreased and a dry, wiry grass was replacing most of the vegetation. He changed his course slightly so that he could walk down the center of a shallow valley where it grew the thickest, listening for the sand hound to scream again.

It did so, much closer than before. Two more answered it from farther back, then a third. Which made four of them racing toward him, each of them like a reptilian ten-foot greyhound with the claws of a tiger and the teeth and jaws of a young tyrannosaurus.

He lighted the grass at his feet, then started two more fires on each side of the first one. Within that short time the tinder-dry grass was burning in a solid wall of flame, pushed down the valley by the wind at increasing speed and spreading wider as it went.

He had to run to get in front of it and then run still faster to keep ahead of it. Through the choking smoke he could see nothing except the red blaze of fire behind him but he heard the sand hounds screeching in frustration beyond it. The sound of their fury faded as he ran on, and then was gone.

A mile farther on he angled to the left, to the rim of the valley where the grass was too thin to burn, and there he rested until his hard panting had subsided. Then he walked on again; to hurry faster and faster as the three moons neared the zenith. Shortly after they had passed the zenith it would be sunrise and the Big Tide would reach the Sea Cliffs.

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He saw no more of the phantom dragon-beasts, but the smoke from the valley he had fired lay like a pall across the desert and visibility was limited.

The eastern sky was lightening with the first glow of dawn when he saw the distant gleam of moonlight on the ocean. The delays during the night had been greater than he had thought—there would be no time margin, at all.

He went the rest of the way in a fast trot, the rope ready in his hand.

The sea to the east was flat and calm when he reached the ragged top of the Sea Cliffs but the pale violet of dawn had turned into a vivid blue-white. Sunrise and the Big Tide were at hand.

He looked down over the edge of the cliffs, down the sheer face of them where the crevice reached up for two hundred feet before it dwindled into nothing, and saw the red-shelled horrors grouped in a thick mass at the bottom. Laughing Girl was above them, wedged tightly in the crevice as far up it as she had been able to climb. It had not been far; the groping claws of the topmost Elephant Crabs were cracking together only inches below her.

He had already tied a series of knots in the end of the rope so she could grip it firmly between her teeth. He dropped the knotted end over the cliff and gave the rope a flip to guide it toward the crevice.

He glanced again to the east, at the calm, flat sea, and in that instant its horizon abruptly swelled and lifted up and became a mountain rushing toward him.

The Elephant Crabs were spilling apart, scrambling to positions of safety where they could anchor themselves against the rough rock surface and be protected by the thick armor of their shells. Laughing Girl was suddenly alone in her refuge, a small black huddle that watched the coming of the Big Tide in frozen helplessness.

The rope was snaking down the crevice as fast as he could play out the coils. He whistled at her as the rope neared her. She jerked up her head, almost falling in her surprise, and greeted him in her native language; a word that was like the joyous yelp of a pup. Then the end of the rope reached her and she seized it between her teeth.

He hauled up on the rope, bringing it back hand over

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hand, while Laughing Girl clawed at the rock to help all she could. She disappeared from his sight where the cliff became vertical and the thin, hard rope was almost impossible to grip tightly as her full weight went upon it.

The tide raced inward as he struggled with the rope; the forefront of an oceanic plateau. Between it and the cliffs the beach and sea below lay like a valley, then a narrow basin, then suddenly a vanishing canyon—

Laughing Girl's head popped into view and she came pawing and scrambling over the edge of the cliff. She dropped the rope and leaped toward him in ecstatic welcome.

"You come for me! You—"

The tide struck the cliffs with a thunderous roar, making the earth shake. He seized Laughing Girl by the scruff of the neck and dropped flat to the ground, where he could lock his free arm around a projection of rock. A solid mass of water was flung high into the air by the impact, to descend upon them with a smashing force that knocked the breath from his lungs and bruised his face against the rocks. He held grimly to the rock and Laughing Girl as the mass of water poured back over the cliff, ripping and tearing at him as it tried to take them with it.

They staggered erect as it drained away and ran. A second mass of skyward-flung water came too late to do more than drench them. They stopped a little farther on, along the top of a low ridge.

Behind them the sea growled and rumbled as it surged against the cliffs. Laughing Girl looked back, trembling a little.

"I thought you had forgot me, Boss. I was scared, and I wait and wait . . ."

"Everything is all right, now," he said. "You won't ever have to go under the Sea Cliffs again."

He was tired, weak with near-exhaustion. He wiped the salty water from his face and saw, as something that was no longer of importance, that the sun was up. His job was done, his last duty carried out, and the thing that would happen next was something inevitable and beyond his control. He saw that his knife was gone, washed into the sea —but that no longer mattered, either.

"You will go home now," he said to Laughing Girl. "Don't wait for me. Loper will probably be starting on

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his way to meet you in a few minutes. He'll tell you about the things that have happened in the past two days. From now on the two of you will do whatever he thinks is best for you."

Her eyes were wide in alarm before he had finished, anxious and questioning.

"What are wrong, Boss? What are going to happen to you—prease, what are wrong?"

A slow, muffled thudding came from the east and he looked into the bright blaze of the sun to see the dragon-beasts trotting down the ridge toward him. There were six of them and even against the sun he could see the gleam of battle helmets and the long rifles across the saddles.

"Go home!" he ordered. "Right now!"

She looked from the approaching war party back to him and flung up her head in defiance as Loper had done.

"No! You know they come to kirr you—I can terr. I stay!"

"There are things you don't yet understand, Girl," he said. "For my sake, go now. Run."

"I—" She hesitated, her sense of duty and sense of loyalty conflicting. The loyalty won. "No! I not go!"

He could not permit her to stay. When the natives shot him down she would attack them with a fury that only her own death could stop.

He stepped forward and hit her; a hard, open-handed blow alongside the jaw that sent her rolling. She got to her feet with amazement and hurt in her eyes and he made his tone harsh and ugly:

"I'll not order you but this one more time—*go home!*"

She obeyed, her tail drooping as she started across the swale. She stopped once, to look back at him, and he motioned her on with a curt gesture.

She was gone from sight when the natives reached him. Resso was not with them—it was Selsin who rode in the lead.

They stopped before him in a semi-circle and regarded him silently, the mocking smiles on their faces.

"It is sunrise," Selsin said.

"It is," he agreed.

"We followed you last night. I wanted to know if you told the truth about going to save the furry one."

"And now," he said, "I want to know if Resso told the truth when he said she and her mate would not be harmed."

"He did."

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There was nothing more to say, then. He waited, wondering if they were deliberately delaying his execution in the hope of seeing him weaken under the tension.

Selsin spoke again:

"Your superior and his aide escaped in the flier shortly after you left. The fire signal at midnight said they had landed on one of the Northern Islands and were firing steadily at a school of bladder fish. They seemed to think the fish were an attacking party."

He had the impression that Selsin and the others were amused. He could understand why—but for himself there was only a sick feeling of shame and the thought: So they wouldn't even leave those kids their blasters?

"It is sunrise," Selsin said again, "and there is no reason to wait any longer. Do you have anything to say?"

"Nothing," he answered, and braced himself for the impact of the bullets.

But the long rifles were not lifted. Instead, Selsin swung down from the saddle and came up to him.

"The furry one—Loper—came to me before dark and told me what you had said to him on the hill. Didn't you know that what you were doing was more proof of good intentions than all the promises in the world?"

"I don't understand," he said.

"You claimed from the beginning that humans respected other forms of life and kept their promises to them—but words are only little noises. You proved what you had claimed when you spent what was to be the last night of your life in keeping the promise you had made to a being who was far less human than even my own race."

"But the camp—" He did not dare believe what Selsin's statements implied. "They were to be killed at sunrise—"

"I ordered the attack postponed until your actions could be judged. Now, there will be no attack."

He tried to see past Selsin's meaningless smile, wishing he had let Laughing Girl stay so she could tell him if they were only taunting him before they killed him.

"You will ride one of the dragon-beasts, if you are ready now," Selsin said. "When you call Earth from your camp today, I will speak to them, too. I want no more misunderstandings."

"What will you tell them?" he asked.

"The truth of it all, and

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how the fat one boasted and insulted my race, and then ran. I will offer the friendship of my race under the condition that no more of his kind ever be sent here and that you, or others of your choice, be in charge of all operations here.

"I suppose," Selsin added, "that your Supreme Council would like to hear what I have to tell them?"

There was a flash of black across the swale and he saw Laughing Girl running toward them; disobeying his order, after all, and come back to fight beside him. But now she was running with her tail up, her white teeth grinning, and happiness like something tangible about her.

She was an Altairian—she *knew* that everything was suddenly all right. There could be no doubt whatever about Selsin's sincerity, about the future that lay ahead for all of them.

Even for Laughing Girl's race, although she did not yet know it. Loper, in his simple wisdom, had made it possible for Earth to regain the friendship of a badly needed world. The Council, in return, could do no less than to promptly overrule the ERB's classification of the Altairians as "Animals."

"The Supreme Council," he said in answer to Selsin's question, "is going to be delighted by what you have to tell them. Let's go."

THE END

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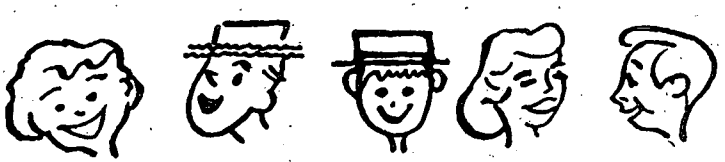

According to you...

Dear Editor:

In reference to the letters of Ed Doerr: I cannot say that I agree with Mr. Doerr's opinions at all, but my prime objection is this: I do not believe that a magazine such as *Fantastic* should be used as a battle ground for a war over faith. If Mr. Doerr wishes to announce to the world that he is an atheist (and you must admit that the bulk of his letter is on not believing in God, using scientists rather as a front) let him go out on the streets and do so, not use *Fantastic* as a proxy. *Fantastic* is a place for fantasy stories, not opinions on religion.

Robert H. Rohrer, Jr.
457 Princeton Way, NE.
Atlanta 7, Ga.

• *Some folks would say having opinions on religion was fantastic in itself. Permit us, however, to print one final comment on the controversy:*

Dear Editor:

Noting the controversy between Joan Maguire and Ed Doerr in the July issue: Joan Maguire's equation of Galileo's "faith" with religious faith is as fantastic as anything that has appeared in your publication to justify its title. Galileo had faith in the ability of the human mind to solve cosmic problems by the use of reason applied to observed facts.

The whole function of religious faith is to sustain belief in propositions unsupported by either reason or observed fact and often contradictory to both.

She tops off this absurdity with the observation, "Since the

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essence of two great forces in the world, Science and Religion, is Faith, how can one repress the other?" One repressed the other in the exact case that she cites. The religious faith that the sun went around the Earth, being in the political saddle, repressed Galileo's "faith" that the opposite was true, on penalty of burning. He recanted in court to save his life, but left the room muttering in his beard, *"E pur si muove." "It moves all the same."*

Religious faith has all the psychological characteristics of mass hypnosis, i.e. complete lack of any relationship with fact or logic—and I claim that that is exactly what it is. Sometimes individual religionists get fed up with the contradictions and change them, in the face of overwhelming evidence, to conform with facts. But it is not faith that causes them to change; they change when their faith gets dented enough.

On the other hand Doerr's notion, based on the attitudes of scientists themselves, that "theologians have had their day," is against the facts also. If the rapidly growing church membership, the vogue of Billy Graham and the like indicate anything, the theologians have had their day only with scientists, who comprise but a tiny minority of the populace. In this respect there is a growing and apparently irrevocable gulf, between science and the people. The people, not being logical and having no respect for fact as compared with wishful thinking, find in religion, not in science, what they want. In fact the rush to religion is largely due to a frightened craving for some kind of escape from the results of science, and the popular attitude toward science is becoming more and more a combination of fear and contempt. (This is in fact indicated by the statements made by many students as to why they won't study science in college.)

Also, there is no sufficient remedy in Doerr's "Humanism." It is still materialism, and there can be no satisfactory solution of the problems of humanity on the basis that a man is a perishable hunk of meat. Fortunately there *is* religion that does not conflict with fact or reason; if humanity is to escape a new Dark Age with atomic trimmings, it will have to wake up to that fact.

Victor Endersby
Box 427
Napa, Calif.

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Dear Editor:

I enjoyed the June issue of *Fantastic* immensely. Cordwainer Smith really fixed the old world up fine with his little tale, "The Fife of Bodidharma." It had been some time since we read anything of his. Hope to see more by him soon.

Mrs. Elaine Fielder
36 James Road
Hatboro, Pa.

● *Well,* somebody's *got to fix it up.*

Dear Editor:

I am new to science fiction and I enjoy reading *Fantastic* magazine very much. I especially enjoyed reading "The Last Plea," by Robert Bloch in the July issue. I liked that Luther Snodgrass, alias Clay Clinton, since I prefer to think of myself as a beatnik.

I hope to see more stories like "The Body Hunters" and "The Creeper in the Dream" coming in future issues.

Ronald C. Pirtle
6649 Nightingale Road
Jacksonville 11, Fla.

● *We always thought science fiction was "out" as far as beatniks were concerned (thank heavens!). Looks like you'll have to choose up sides, boy.*

Dear Editor:

I've never written to an editor before, I read only to enjoy, not to write complimentary—or derogatory—letters to someone who in the final analysis, is only doing his job.

However, the August issue of *Fantastic* contained a problem in mathematics that I can't get out of my mind. The story was "Let X=Alligator," by Jack Sharkey. The problem is stated on page 24.

I have arrived at the answer through the use of graph paper and trial and error. Then proving the answer through mathematics. However, I would like you to explain how the answer can be arrived at through mathematics. As Gregory says (in the story) "It seems so simple . . . It *must* be simple! *Is* there a mathematical answer?"

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My opinion of your magazine would not be representative. I'm the type of science fiction reader who loves science fiction for its own sake. I've read science fiction for almost 30 years. I buy every s-f magazine and book that hits the newsstands.

My only complaint is that there is not enough science fiction being published today to supply my demands. Though I read everything, I do prefer stories that contain something to puzzle over like Mr. Sharkey's story.

L. L. Stevens
Box 575
Waynoka, Okla.

• *You know what happened to Gregory. Better stop while you still have a head!*

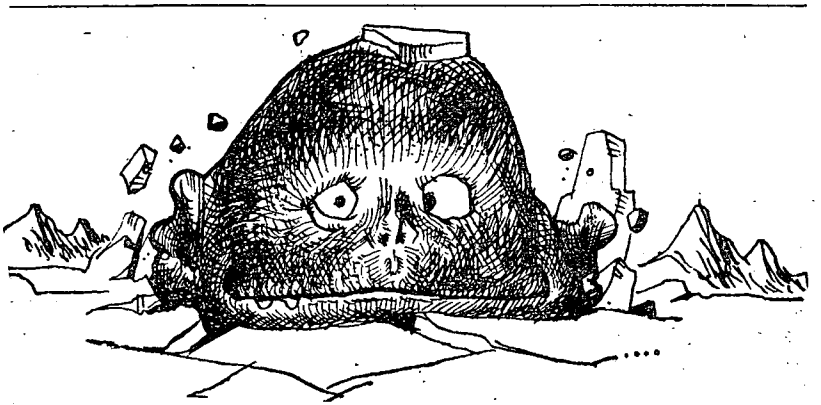
Dear Editor:

I have just finished reading the July issue of *Fantastic.* Such an issue should not go unrewarded. The whole magazine was a great big hunk of entertainment without one letup. This was one of your greatest issues and kept me reading from start to finish. "The Last Plea," by Robert Bloch did nothing to hurt his or your reputation, while "The 4-Sided Triangle" and "The Key" were also of outstanding quality.

One question: Why does A. Bertram Chandler always write about the Rim Worlds?

Harold Grundmann

• *He was born there.*



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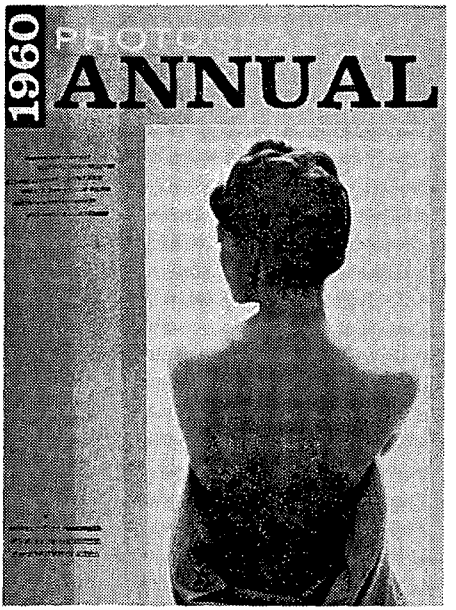

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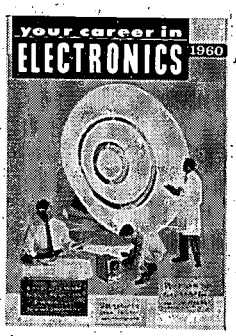

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